THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS TEACHING CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME IN THE EARLY YEARS OF SCHOOLING

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Keywords and Definitions

Keywords

Down syndrome, teachers, early years of schooling, inclusive education, diversity, constructivism, social constructivism, collective case study, professional development, mind mapping, teachers' stories

Definitions

Down syndrome — Down syndrome is a chromosomal disorder that results in the presence of an additional third chromosome (Selikowitz, 1997). It is the most frequent genetic cause of mild to moderate intellectual and developmental disabilities. In Australia, the current term for the diagnosis is *Down syndrome*. Despite the various ways Down syndrome is written in the wider community, the most correct terminology is Down syndrome with no apostrophe 's' after Down, and a small 's' for syndrome (Down Syndrome Association of Queensland Incorporated, 2010).

General education classrooms — General education classrooms are defined as regular classrooms which are not specific to children with disabilities or specific to any particular student population.

Teaching approach — In this research, teaching approach is referred to as encompassing a teacher's pedagogy or their teaching practices, as well as their knowledge and beliefs that impact their practices. It encompasses the way they teach, the way they view their students and incorporates the learning environments teachers create in their teaching space.

Early years of schooling — The early years of schooling in this research are situated between the Preparatory (Prep) Year and Year Three and encompasses the first four years of formal schooling.

Abstract

This qualitative research examined teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling in general education classrooms, using a collective case study approach to present the experiences of three teachers in three separate schools. The three case studies provide descriptions of each teacher's teaching approach, school context and classroom context positioning the teachers within their wider cultural, social and political contexts. Constructivism was used as a theoretical framework which underpinned the research. Data collection consisted of observations, interviews and a mind mapping technique to ensure the data was interpreted as closely as possible to the teachers' experiences.

Findings from this research describe differences in teachers' conceptualisation of children with Down syndrome, and how these variations impacted the way the child was included (or excluded) in the class. Results indicated teachers are more likely to effectively include children with Down syndrome into their general education classrooms if they operate within more contemporary understandings of disability.

Professional development was identified as critical to supporting teachers' experiences; however, issues with professional development included the prohibitive cost of professional development, teachers being out of their classrooms for extended periods, the timing of professional development and the relevance of it to their role in supporting individual students. School leadership, resourcing and support models and effective collaborative partnerships were identified as critical to supporting teachers' experiences.

Teachers are widely regarded as pivotal to the effectiveness of inclusive education; however, the experiences of teachers are under-researched. This is the first Australian research to document teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. The findings contribute to better understandings of the importance of the teachers' role in how children experience inclusion (or exclusion) in the early years of schooling. This knowledge may in-turn contribute to better outcomes for children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: 30 May 2014

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Many people have asked me where the interest in Down syndrome has come from. In my family I have a cousin with Down syndrome — Michele. Much of my childhood years were spent with Michele growing up together. I thought the way my family and my community treated Michele was indicative of the wider society. It was only as I grew older did I realise this was not always the case. Later on, as a teacher working with families with children with Down syndrome I witnessed other situations. Part of this research belongs to my family, and to Michele, who showed me the value in everyone and the inherent capacity of us all.

To my husband, Ian, who has walked every step of this journey with me, there is no way this would have been possible without you. Your belief in me has meant everything. I thank you for your patience, insistence I could do it and unwavering love and support. To my wonderful children Georgia, Campbell, Cooper and Phoebe, it is not always easy sharing your mum with a big project like this, although having you all has enabled me to keep perspective about what is really important in life. Thank you all for keeping me firmly grounded in this journey and for rolling your eyes when I talked about my thesis. This has allowed me to not be too consumed by the project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

This research explores teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in their early years classrooms. Full participation and the inclusion of children with disabilities is a world-wide goal (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). While there is growing research which focuses on children who have Down syndrome, there is little literature that specifically focuses on Australian teachers including children with Down syndrome in their classrooms. Although evidence is available on the attitudes towards the educational inclusion of children with Down syndrome by teachers (Gilmore, Campbell, & Cuskelly, 2003), the experiences of teachers themselves is not well understood. The focus of the current research addresses this gap in the research.

A social constructivist framework is used within this thesis to frame an understanding of teachers' multiple experiences, varying interactions, and contexts in which they work. It is acknowledged in literature that school leadership and general school culture are significant to the implementation of inclusive education (Ferguson, 2008). Without acknowledging the importance of the interplay of these elements, the positive inclusive culture of schools can be compromised (Carrington & Elkins, 2002). The current research addresses these concerns as it documents teachers' current daily realities and discusses how these social interactions impact on them as teachers working with children who have Down syndrome.

For over a decade teachers have been reporting the same concerns about the inclusion of children with a disability in their general education classes including pragmatic issues such as resourcing, time constraints, support issues and additional planning requirements (Shaddock et al., 2007). While these concerns are expressed in relation to working with children who have disabilities in general, very little is known about how teachers in Australia include a child with Down syndrome into their classrooms.

Children with Down syndrome are increasingly being educated in general education settings. Given that Down syndrome is identified as the most frequent genetic cause of intellectual disability (Sherman, Allen, Bean, & Freeman, 2007) it is appropriate to focus attention on how children with Down syndrome are being included in general education settings. Evident in the research base is literature on Down syndrome in the educational context, however little research is evident on teachers' perspectives in the early school years.

Inclusive classrooms and inclusive teaching approaches benefit children with disabilities including the provision of higher levels of social competence and communication skills, opportunities to build on friendships and some identified gains in curriculum areas (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2005; Foreman, 2008). Many teachers find supporting inclusion requires some changes in their approaches to teaching and learning (Foreman, 2008). These changes come in the form of making judgements about the amount of support needed to facilitate inclusion, and extra demands on teachers to problem-solve to ensure challenges associated with the inclusion of a child with a disability are overcome (Foreman, 2008). For children with Down syndrome in classrooms, there is evidence that their educational experiences are not always inclusive, and that exclusion and discrimination still occur (Rietveld, 2008).

Within the Australian context, parents of children with disabilities have reported that inclusive education does not always live up to the theory espoused by educators (Queensland Parents for People with a Disability [QPPD], 2011). Research has identified that many parents do not feel confident about inclusive policies in Queensland schools, and are concerned that some children with disabilities do not have a sense of belonging and achievement in local school contexts (QPPD, 2011). While it has been identified that schools can be inclusive, over a third of parents surveyed conveyed that their child was unable to access education on the basis of equal opportunity at the school of the parents' choice (QPPD, 2011). Although parents are not the focus of the current research, they are significant stakeholders who play an important role in how teachers approach working with children with Down syndrome in their classrooms.

There have been no studies within Australia solely concerned with the experiences of teachers working with children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling, despite the early years of schooling being widely considered to be

a critical period in a child's life (Pendergast & Danby, 2012). In addition, there is very little material produced by teachers, for teachers, about how to include children with a disability in general education classes, and in particular with a focus on improving learning outcomes for these children. Shaddock, Smyth King, and Giorcelli (2007) report that, when teachers need more information on inclusive teaching approaches, practices and experiences their preferred model is to learn from other teachers who have experience in the area.

To understand what supports teachers require to implement inclusive education successfully it is important to identify their current realities within their classrooms and schools. In the current research it was particularly important to document teachers' experiences of including a student with Down syndrome into their classrooms for several reasons. First, case studies of teachers' experiences offer insights for other practitioners. These kinds of experiences in the early years of schooling have not been reported on in the research to date; therefore, the current research fills a significant gap in our understanding in this area. Second, how teachers conceptualise children with Down syndrome as learners in the early years of schooling in Australia has not previously been extensively researched. While it is important to know how teachers experience having children with Down syndrome in their class, it is also important to understand what teachers are thinking in relation to children with Down syndrome, especially in relation to the students' capabilities and capacities to participate in an inclusive classroom. The important consideration is: how do teachers' thoughts and beliefs about students with Down syndrome relate to what they do in working with them in the teaching and learning context?

The third reason for the current research is related to the changing nature of educational policy in Australia. The implementation of a new Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2010) has seen a shift away from a focus on inclusive education to a focus on diversity. This shift of language in current policy has implications for teachers and raises significant questions such as: Is there an agreed understanding of what inclusion means and what diversity means? How does this shift in language play out, if at all, at the classroom level? What supports are offered to teachers to make this transition in thinking, particularly in relation to including students who have Down syndrome in their class? The current research provides some insight on how teachers are

experiencing this introduction of curriculum and what impact it has on them when working with a student with a disability in their classroom.

The current research sought to address these concerns by providing the voices of teachers using the overarching research question which is:

What are teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling (Years Prep-Three)?

To gain a deep understanding of this question the sub-questions to the research include:

1). What factors support and challenge teachers' teaching approaches when working with a child with Down syndrome in their classroom?

2). In what ways do teachers teaching children with Down syndrome conceptualise their students as learners?

In order to address these questions an understanding of disability needs to be given, followed by particular reference to children who have Down syndrome. The following section provides a conceptualisation of disability that describes the possible conflict teachers may face in understanding and subsequently teaching children with disabilities.

1.2 CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF DISABILITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Historically, one of the most dominant influences in educational practice has been a *medical model* of disability (Oliver, 1996). The *medical model* of disability has strong historical ties to the medical profession, and consequently this has resulted in the identification, labelling and placement of children within the school system from medical-based information and diagnoses of disability (Corbett & Norwich, 2005). Emphasis is placed on the deficit functioning of children, such as those who have Down syndrome where developmental and functional norms are compared with typically developing children (Dykeman, 2006). The diagnosis of an individual defect is considered the baseline for intervention and remediation (Slee, 1998). The focus is therefore on what children cannot do as they enter the early phase of learning, rather than what they can do. One limitation of this model is its mechanistic process, where children are reduced to an epidemiology of symptoms and individual

deficits. This creates specialised segregated education (Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009), and in turn perpetuates the use of categories, without adequately representing diversity amongst students with disabilities (Johnstone, 2001).

Historically, for children with Down syndrome this model has seen repeated exclusion from general education settings, and has had a major impact on how children with Down syndrome have been educated. For children with Down syndrome, the historical focus of the *medical model* and its preoccupation with biological limitations has provided an assumption that characteristics of students' disability were static and all encompassing (Oliver, 1996; Rietveld, 2008). Furthermore, this assumption translates for children with Down syndrome as not being able to learn or that learning is limited, and the deficit view of their disability imbues a sense of personal tragedy or a charity view of disability (Oliver, 1996). The result, for the learner with Down syndrome, is a view of the child as being "dependent, helpless, passive, needy and requiring compensation" (Neilson, 2000, p. 21). In educational settings this can result in limitations being placed on the child with Down syndrome and their learning, as their peers and educators adopt a more compensatory approach to learning, rather than a focus on educational achievement (Rietveld, 2005).

Traditionally, society has viewed people with Down syndrome with stereotypical understandings of how they learn. These understandings have included historic views that children with Down syndrome should be segregated into special schools which provided limited opportunities to learn. Under a *medical model* of disability the concept of intelligence has been very limited. This model has contributed to restrictive assumptions about how children with disabilities could learn and imbued an overarching negative view of disability. For example, for children with Down syndrome, this approach to teaching may result in a lack of recognition of the students' capacity to learn and that learning somehow tapers off over time. A characterisation that special needs are caused by individual limitations has contributed to the concept of disability as deficits located within the individual (Terzi, 2005). This approach does not take into account educational practices and indeed social, political or cultural forces that impact the individual's educational experience.

With an increase in the movement towards more inclusive education there has been a move away from a *medical model* of disability and, consequently, the meaning of intelligence has been reconceptualised. These newer understandings of intelligence have been fundamental to shifting away from a deficit view of intelligence of children with Down syndrome. This shift has involved more credence being placed on interactions and social experiences. From re-examination of societal beliefs and values in the 1970s the *social model* of disability was introduced. It has been advocated that a change from a deficit model approach to a *social model* of disability needs to be adopted by teachers if teachers are to work inclusively with students in their classrooms and schools (Rietveld, 2008).

A *social model* approach has led to a rejection of biology and pathology as part of a personal tragedy located within the individual. Advocates of the *social model* espouse that disability cannot just be viewed medically but needs to be viewed through a societal lens encompassing attitudes, values and beliefs which operate within the society (Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009). This view is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of social constructivism where the construction of knowledge is the product of social interactions, interpretation and understanding (Adams, 2007). Worldwide inclusive educational policy change has been heavily influenced and guided by the framework of the *social model*. Australian educational policy has been heavily influenced by the *social model* through the introduction of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992) and subsequently the *Disability Standards for Education* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). These guidelines have provided the trajectory for inclusive education and will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.9 of this thesis.

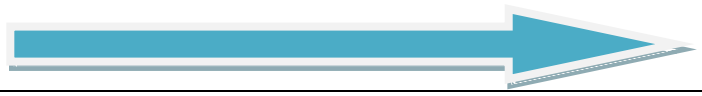
The *social model*, however, is not without criticism. Although being recognised as integral to any debate relating to inclusive education, the *social model* has been criticised as being theoretically flawed (Terzi, 2004). Swain and French (2000) argue that the *social model* does not provide a foundation that repudiates the stereotype of disability being viewed as personal tragedy, or that people with disabilities are not living happy and fulfilled lives. Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009) concur that the *social model*, in relation to inclusive education, needs to be clarified and extended to give an adequate ideological framework to provide impetus for inclusive education.

The way teachers interact and facilitate relationships is critical to a child's experience. The manner in which a child contextualises the world involves dynamic and fluid constructions developed through multiple relationships formed and reformed between children and their surroundings (Kliewer, 1998). The relevance here for teachers is that, if they are only looking at medical information and from a deficit approach, they miss the impact of social interactions, and the impact of their own role in the education process. The idea of defect emerges from culturally devalued sets of relationships that the child has with his or her surroundings. In essence, when the child is viewed by the teacher as not a contributor to their own learning because of perceived deficits, the teacher sets the child apart from the others in the class (Rieber, Carton, Knox, & Stevens, 1993).

This reconstruction of disability from a pathological entity to acknowledgment of disability as being impacted by social interaction and context has been a driving force in the implementation of the approach known as inclusive schooling. It has been noted that the values, beliefs, and attitudes held by teachers influence the success of teachers working with students who have disabilities (Carrington, 2006; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2012). How teachers view students with Down syndrome or with other disabilities is dependent on their own values, beliefs, and attitudes. A contributing factor to teachers' perspectives of their students with disabilities as learners is the influence of these wider historical disability frameworks. In order to understand teachers' constructions of disability, and understand the relevance of this in relation to teaching and learning it is important to review these models. How these frameworks affect teachers' inclusion of a child with Down syndrome is depicted in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Continuum of Models of Disability and the Implications for Teachers



	The medical model	**Newer social models**
The teachers' view of child	Positions the child as having deficits which the teacher needs to address in order for the child to fit in May view the child with Down syndrome as not being able to do what other children can do of a similar age	Understands that every child has unique skills, strengths and backgrounds. Understands the importance of context, teaching approach and environmental factors on the child Sense of belonging for the child in the class is increased
The implications this view has for teachers	Teachers may feel disempowered as they try to overcome the perceived deficits in the child May result in a loss of confidence as teachers feel overwhelmed in their role	Teacher understands the child as an individual, learning about their strengths and challenges Teacher uses knowledge about the child to engage the child in learning Encourages the child to build feelings of competency, providing impetus for future learning The child is given a sense of ownership of their learning Teachers may experience increased feelings of efficacy
The implications this view has for the wider class and for the child with Down syndrome	Wider class sees disability as deficits within the child Other children may feel sorry for the child and try to help Undervaluing of diversity within the classroom culture	Wider class can see value in diversity Wider class builds a culture of competence and community within the classroom

It is posited in the current research that teachers who work in more contemporary paradigms use more inclusive strategies. These inclusive strategies focus on key areas such as teachers' skills to teach students, the organisation and usage of the learning environment, and the teachers' own abilities, competencies, and

attitudes (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2011). In contrast, teachers who work in historical, pathological paradigms tend to focus on the diagnosis of the child and the deficits that they must work with in the class (Sharma et al., 2011). For teachers, a shift in paradigms is critical to the way they view their students. Little is known about how teachers working with students with Down syndrome view their students in the classroom and their experiences teaching them. Is there a preference to work within the socially constructed paradigm for inclusive education or do teachers still subscribe to a pathological paradigm? What is the significance for either in working with students with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling? Little is known about the strategies teachers use, their conceptualisation of students with Down syndrome and what supports are useful for teachers teaching students with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. The current research addresses these issues.

1.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research context for this study is teaching children who have Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. This period encompasses the Prep Year to Year Three (children generally between the ages of four and nine years). The research took place in three separate classrooms in three schools in Queensland, Australia. Each classroom was in a regular school setting, not separate schools particularly for children with disabilities. Two of the schools came under the auspices of Education Queensland and one school was in the Catholic Education system. The reasons for situating the research within these contexts are discussed below.

Within Australia there is a heightened awareness within governments of the importance of the early years on a child's foundational social, physical, emotional and cognitive development (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2008). This period defined as the early years of a child's life is from birth to eight years and encompasses the early years of schooling for children. The early years of schooling is recognised as a critical period in a child's schooling (Pendergast & Danby, 2012). The effects of the early years of schooling impact the way children experience learning throughout the latter schooling years, and into adulthood (Pendergast & Danby, 2012). The formation of language, communication, social and cognitive skills begin in the early

years of schooling and provide a foundation for learning. It therefore follows that how children are viewed and treated in the early years of schooling may have an impact on subsequent years of learning in the same school.

In Queensland, reforms to the early years of schooling have been highlighted as part of broader reforms to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities (Department of Education, Training and Employment, [DETE], 2013). An evaluation of the trial that focused on the introduction of Prep classes in Queensland found that teachers held limited understanding of how to teach to the diversity of children in their class (Thorpe, Tayler, Bridgstock, Grieshaber, Skoien, Danby, & Petriwskyj, 2004). There was evidence in this evaluation of the need to deepen teachers' understandings of diversity and how to pedagogically enact these understandings as teaching practices in the early years of schooling (Thorpe et al., 2004).

Recent research on how teachers understand diverse learners in their classrooms highlights some areas of concern (Petriwskyj, 2010). Teachers in the research showed evidence of operating within older models of diversity that were built around the use of specialised support services where children were removed from the general classroom. Working within this older model of diversity may explain the responses and understanding of the teachers when conceptualising diversity (Petriwskyj, 2010). The data suggested that teachers face many challenges in understanding diversity in the early years of schooling and the application of newer thinking about diversity takes time for teachers to adopt in their teaching approaches. An additional concern identified in the research was that teachers expressed having a lack of access to adequate professional development to support them in their work (Petriwskyj, 2010). With limited research in this area, it is not known how effectively teachers are implementing inclusive practices, or what supports are successful and what challenges teachers face. To effectively support teachers in their roles in early years classrooms it is vital to first understand their current realities.

1.4 HOW CHILDREN ARE REPRESENTED IN THIS RESEARCH

Throughout this thesis children are referred to as learners, students, and of course children. This nomenclature is noted by the researcher and the rationale is as

follows. In the current research, the researcher predominantly uses the terms child or children to describe children in the study as this is how the researcher refers to children in her work as an early childhood teacher. What became apparent in the data collection was that participants used the terms child, children, learner, and student interchangeably. It is evident as children pass through early education into the early years of schooling, their identity as children take on a further perspective, that of the student.

The researcher has an understanding of the child as competent and actively engaged in co-constructing their own knowledge and experiences (Malaguzzi, 1993). The use of student as a term for children at school is universal in Australian schools and throughout Australian school documents. In the current research the term is used by the participants as well. Therefore, the researcher uses the terms child, children and students interchangeably given the participants' use of language and to reflect the language used in wider systemic policies and education context.

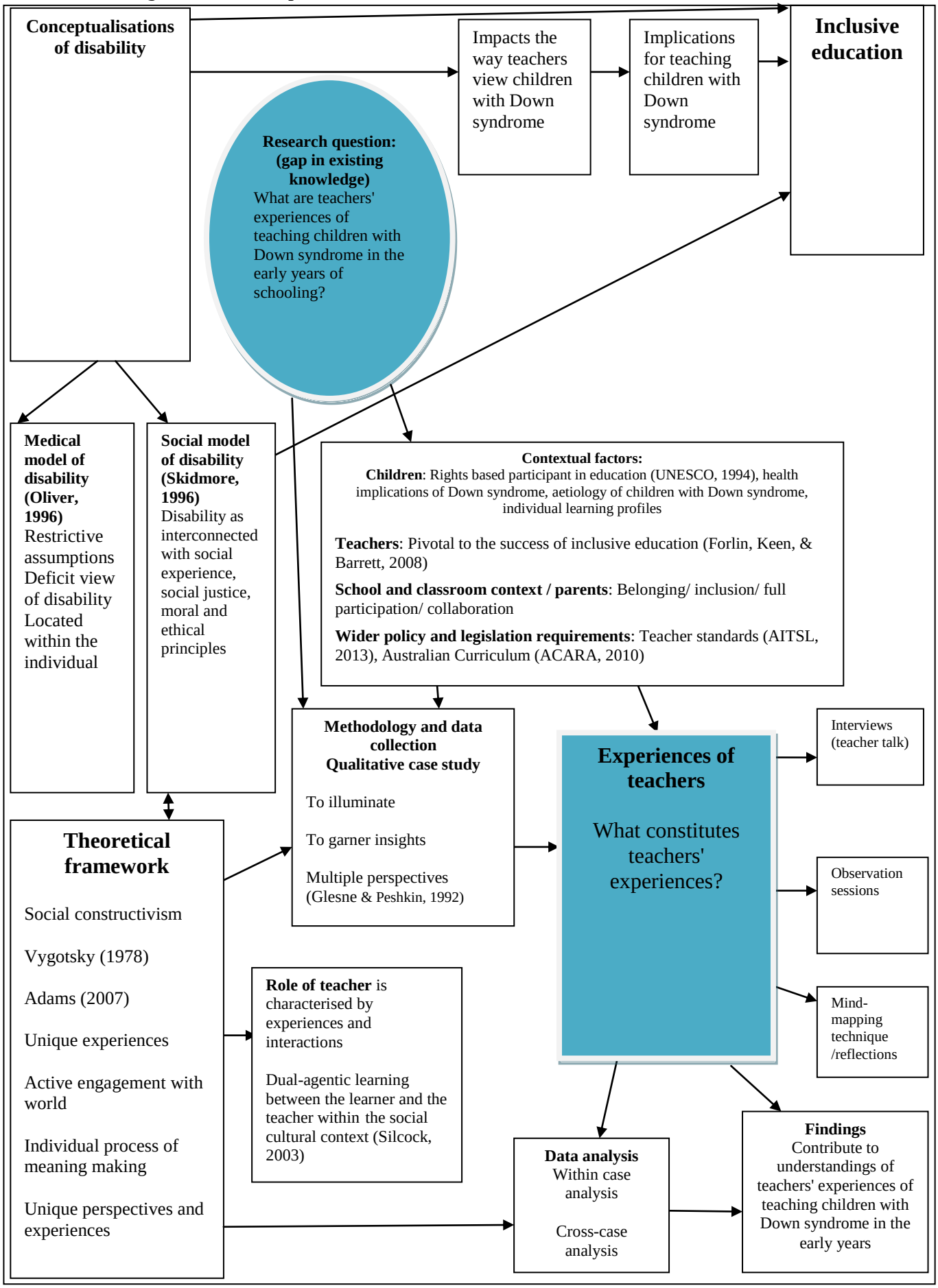
1.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Several interconnected factors inform this research and collectively they have informed the methodological choices made by the researcher and guided both the data collection and data analysis. The methodological decisions are underpinned by the theoretical framework adopted for use within the research. These factors combine to build the conceptual framework which guides the research. The conceptual framework is outlined in the following section beginning with how the researcher's background has provided impetus for the research. A visual conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) is used to describe the impact of the theoretical underpinnings of this research, and how the theoretical underpinnings relate to understanding the complexity of researching teachers' experiences.

A number of key links are evident in the conceptual framework. How teachers conceptualise their students with Down syndrome is affected by their own conceptualisations of disability. These conceptualisations of disability then in turn impact the way they view their students with Down syndrome. This view of students has wider implications for their teaching. More contemporary conceptualisations of disability are consistent with inclusive education. The aim of the research questions in this research relate to identifying teachers' experiences, and as such are linked to a methodology which is consistent with these questions. The work of teachers is linked

to and impacted by wider contextual factors, such as wider policy and legislation requirements. The school context, classroom context and interactions with parents are identified as key elements impacting teachers' experiences. To access teachers' experiences it was necessary to use a variety of sources which accessed what teachers said about their experiences, what was observed in their classrooms, and their reflections about teaching a child with Down syndrome.

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework for the Research



1.5.1 Researcher's Background

As a teacher and Education Consultant for a state-based Down syndrome peak body, the researcher has worked extensively with teachers and families throughout their schooling journey. I have observed and worked with many teachers unsure of how to include a student with Down syndrome into their settings, administrative teams highly anxious about students with Down syndrome starting at their settings, and parents frustrated about their child's experiences of the early years of schooling. I have also seen many teachers confident and capable in their roles. I began to wonder why this was, and what were the combinations of factors that resulted in the success of some teachers and not of others?

In my experience I also found that there was a variance in attitudes to disability amongst the teachers I worked with. Most teachers knew of the policy contexts in which they were working in relation to inclusive education; however, policy and practice differed significantly. Questions I asked myself were: Why did some teachers seem to be so confident and others barely made it through the day? Why did some teachers feel effectively supported by their schools, while others did not? Why did some teachers conceptualise children with Down syndrome as learners within their classrooms, while others accepted their inclusion into the classroom as contributing solely to the building of the child's social skills, but not as learners?

One of my roles as an Education Consultant was to provide teachers with up-to-date research on the experiences of teachers working with children with Down syndrome. When seeking this research for teachers, I found that while there was a multitude of information on the internet, it was not empirically based and most originated from overseas sources. I could find no Australian information other than anecdotal stories from disability agencies. This lack of empirical research has provided impetus for the current research. Having run professional development programs for teachers, overwhelmingly the most popular parts of the workshops have been the sharing of experiences from teachers to other teachers. Talking about practical applications and challenges of inclusive education for children with Down syndrome in their individual contexts provided support and learning opportunities for teachers. This research is based upon the concept that through the sharing of teachers' experiences practical applications of teacher research maybe used to inform others in their contexts.

1.5.2 Theoretical Position

This research uses constructivism as a theoretical framework and social constructivism in particular. Constructivism highlights the unique experiences of individuals as they create meaning through active involvement and engagement with the world. Each individual process of making this meaning is unique and is valued as each individual's own way of representing their experiences (Crotty, 1998). In the current research, constructivism is used in acknowledgment that teachers all have their own unique perspectives and experiences. So too, as a researcher, I have my own individual interpretation of teaching and the research process. As a researcher, I must remain aware of my own biases about including students who have Down syndrome in early years schooling, and keep these separate from those represented by participants in the research. Constructivism provides a framework with which to work with these varying interpretations. The further use of social constructivism as a theoretical perspective emphasises the importance of the socio-cultural context of people in how their knowledge constructions are impacted by their engagement with their social contexts (Crotty, 1998). In the current research, the focus is on teachers' interactions with children who have Down syndrome and who are in the early years of schooling.

Social constructivism builds on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and more recently elaborated on by Rogoff (1990) and Wertsch (1991). An underlying theme of social constructivism is that thought and knowledge are inextricably linked with social context (Mallory & New, 1994; Wertsch, 1991). A key assumption in this theory is that knowledge is influenced by others in the community. For teachers who work in complex contexts, this understanding of the nature of knowledge construction as being impacted by context is significant. Social constructivism, in the current research, is used as a theory base that acknowledges that individual teachers' knowledge and experience is not developed solely internally, but is rather constructed through interaction and engagement with their wider social contexts. In acknowledgment of the interplay between individual and social context, contextual information is provided in each of the three case studies in this research in order to frame the teachers' experiences.

Historically, teachers used more behaviourist approaches that considered the learner to be a *tabula rasa*, or a blank slate, and there was a focus on transmission-

based teaching (Adams, 2007). In contemporary times, constructivist theories have suggested that learners shape their own learning and experiences through interaction with teachers and peers and in an active process of construction (Adams, 2007). The relevance of this for the teachers in the current study is that the adoption of a social constructivist theoretical framework is an understanding of each teacher as unique and that their experiences will differ according to their own contextual circumstances.

The aim of the current research is to understand teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome, how they conceptualise their students in their classrooms and the impact this has on their teaching practices. Social constructivism allows the importance of the teacher and those in the social context to be the primary focus, taking the focus away from merely the subject matter to be taught, to including the broader contextual issues as well (Adams, 2007). In this sense, the contexts such as the learning environment become important and need to be considered in the research.

Perhaps the most important use of this theoretical framework is in understanding the role of the teacher. Social constructivist theory views learning as being dual-agentic, between the learner and the teacher, and also learner/teacher within the social cultural context (Silcock, 2003). As these factors combine, the decisions of the parties scaffold each other (Silcock, 2003). The scaffolding results from the teachers' role being an active role, listening and observing, and engaging in interactions with the student. This reappraisal of the teacher and learner relationship in a social constructivist frame notes the key role teachers play in their classrooms and schools. The way teachers interact with the children in their classrooms and with broader social contexts impact on their own experiences, and their students' experience. These interactions set up the dynamics of the school experience for all involved, whether positive or negative.

In order to capture the complexities of the participants' experiences in the current research, it was necessary to go into their contexts of the classrooms and spend time talking to and observing teachers within these contexts. However, teachers do not work in isolation. Despite possibly being the only teacher in a classroom they are impacted by a wide variety of interrelated factors and systemic issues. Some of these factors include interactions with parents, other teachers, school

administration staff, the new Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010), Teacher Standards (Australian, Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2013), wider policy issues, and legislative requirements.

1.5.3 Methodology

A qualitative collective case study was used and considered as a best fit for the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of this research. Deep insight into teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome was an aim of the research, and case study provided a suitable methodology to gather rich insight from the perspectives of the participants (Merriam, 1998). Three cases were researched with each teacher a single case. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and a mind mapping technique. Data analysis was completed with each single case before moving to a cross-case analysis. The participants' words and experiences as told by them were woven into a narrative structure in Chapter Four and combined with the researcher's interpretations.

1.6 THESIS OUTLINE

This chapter provides an introduction to the research program. Chapter One explores the research purpose, the research questions, a background to the research and the research context.

Chapter Two contains the Literature Review, where the research program is situated within the literature on current understandings of Down syndrome, inclusive education, and literature on the teachers' role in inclusive education. Literature is drawn from these areas to refine understandings of the impact of the changing paradigm of inclusive education and diversity, and explore how inclusive education frames current teachers' work in their own classrooms and schools.

In Chapter Three, the research paradigm is discussed and the implications for the research approach and design are outlined. The rationale for using a qualitative case study is also discussed. Data collection methods and the process of data analysis will be outlined and discussed in Chapter Three.

The results of each case study are presented in Chapter Four. These results are framed with contextual information of each of the wider schools in which the teachers work, their classrooms, and the child with Down syndrome that they are

teaching. The results from each case study are presented as separate cases within Chapter Four and presented under the headings of teaching approach, perspectives of diversity, and collaboration.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the results of the individual cases outlined in Chapter Four. First, the data is analysed within each case. The results are then discussed using cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) where the data is analysed across the three cases. This process has been used to build a deeper understanding of the data across the three cases.

This research is not regarded as a definitive study and, like all research, has its limitations, which are discussed in Chapter Five. Chapter Five also outlines key conclusions made in the research, the methodological contribution the research makes and implications and recommendations for future research are presented.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter One has provided an overview of the research problem. The research problem has been identified, along with research questions. A discussion on historical conceptualisations of disability in inclusive education has been presented. The research context for this research has been identified. A conceptual framework of this research has been presented and related to the researcher's background and the origins of the research, combined with the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the study. The following chapter includes a Literature Review that positions this research in light of contemporary knowledge of inclusive education, teaching in inclusive environments, and further information on Down syndrome.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is focused on teachers working with children with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling. The research is based within the early years of schooling in recognition of the critical nature of this time in a child's schooling and to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' role in teaching children with Down syndrome in this phase. As outlined in this review there is little literature on the experiences of teachers working with children with Down syndrome in general education schools, even less focused in the early years of schooling. Within the Australian context the literature base related to teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling is even more limited. Exploring teachers' experiences with children with Down syndrome in this research contributes to filling this identified gap in the contemporary literature base.

This Literature Review will begin by first identifying background information on Down syndrome (section 2.2) to illustrate health implications of Down syndrome. The following section includes an exploration of issues surrounding aetiology, individualism and the subsequent implications of Down syndrome in the educational environment (section 2.3). Results of a systematic literature review regarding what is known currently about teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling are presented in (Section 2.4 - 2.6). Australia has a long history of inclusive educational policy and practices which allow all children the right to equal opportunity in education. Section 2.9 will provide an overview of inclusive education policy in general, in Australia overall (section 2.9.1), and policy specifically in the Queensland context (section 2.9.2). With a clear focus from policy, the following section (2.9.3) will explore the notion of inclusive schooling. The final section (2.9.4) explores the ideals of inclusion and engaging diversity.

2.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON DOWN SYNDROME

Down syndrome is a chromosomal disorder that results in the presence of an additional third chromosome twenty-one or 'Trisomy 21' (Selikowitz, 1997). Named

after John Langdon Down, the first physician to identify the syndrome, Down syndrome is the most frequent genetic cause of intellectual disability (Sherman, et al., 2007). Down syndrome has varying associated medical implications and occurs in approximately one out of every eight hundred live births (Roizen, 2007) in all races and economic groups. There are three types of Down syndrome (Talay-Ongan, 2004). These types include Trisomy 21, Translocation, and Mosaic Down syndrome. In the case of Trisomy 21 there are three of chromosome 21 in every cell, translocation includes part of chromosome 21 being attached to another chromosome in every cell, and Mosaicism includes some cells which have three of chromosome 21 and others which have two (Sherman et al., 2007). Characteristics which formed the basis of the diagnosis of Down syndrome included the palmar crease on the hand, low muscle tone, epicanthic folds on the eyes, a large gap between the big and the next toes, a small mouth in comparison to the tongue, and gold spots in the iris of the eyes (Faragher & Clarke, 2014).

As the current research is focused on the education of learners with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling, it is contended that teachers must have an understanding of the identified health conditions associated with Down syndrome for effective inclusion of these students in their classrooms. Extensive knowledge is not required; however, an understanding of associated health conditions, balanced with an understanding of the individual nature of all learners with Down syndrome is necessary for teachers to effectively teach young children with Down syndrome. For this reason the following review focuses on research relating to health conditions and educational implications of Down syndrome.

A common issue in children with Down syndrome is that of ear infections (Roizen & Patterson, 2003), with common manifestations including chronic ear disease and hearing loss (Park, Wilson, Stevens, Harward, & Hohler, 2011). Issues with hearing may be pervasive with estimates of hearing loss ranging from 38% to 78% of individuals with Down syndrome. Conductive hearing loss from the presence of middle ear fluid and ear infections can result in the fluctuation of hearing loss levels (Park et al., 2011). High reported rates of hearing loss and impairment have implications for the education of children with Down syndrome. If a teacher is unaware of hearing issues the child may appear disengaged, exhibit behavioural challenges, and be unable to progress in related communication tasks. In a study of

children with Down syndrome at eight years of age, hearing loss and conductive hearing loss was reported as common and highlighted the importance of audiological vigilance in follow up testing of hearing (Austeng, Akre, Falkenberg, Overland, Abdelnoor, & Kvaerner, 2013). In order to optimise educational outcomes for children with Down syndrome educators need to be aware of the high rates of hearing impairments and subsequent educational implications.

Children with Down syndrome also have a high prevalence of ocular disorders (Elma, Dickson, Kindley, Scott, & Charleton, 2007). Children with these disorders have a dramatically increased chance of congenital cataracts and refractive errors occurring at preschool age which have been noted to increase with age (Elma et al., 2007). Other identified conditions include reduced visual acuity, increased use of glasses, strabismus and nystagmus. During school the issues related to vision difficulties are areas teachers need to be cognisant of as these vision issues have the potential to impact learning significantly. Adjustments in the classroom with regards to print based materials, and the positioning of children with Down syndrome within the learning environment may contribute to the enhancement of learning.

Other associated health implications of Down syndrome include an increased risk of cardiac, pulmonary and gastrointestinal anomalies, and thyroid dysfunction (Graber, Chacko, Regelmann, Costin, & Rapaport, 2012). Hypothyroidism or underactive thyroid function, congenital heart disease and a number of respiratory conditions have also been identified as heath implications of Down syndrome (Pandit & Fitzgerald, 2012). Educational implications of these health issues vary from individual to individual; however, they have the potential to affect learning in a variety of ways. Fatigue, muscle weakness, persistent nasal discharge and constipation (Graber et al., 2012) may result in extended absences from school which does not contribute to the maintenance of social relationships and optimisation of educational outcomes. Fatigue if confused with non-engagement or a lack of motivation may be misdiagnosed by educators and contribute to misunderstandings of observable behaviours in children with Down syndrome.

2.3 BALANCING AETIOLOGY AND INDIVIDUALISM - IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

It is significant to note that for children with Down syndrome, as with all children, there is uniqueness. Children with Down syndrome have inherent

individual traits and strengths, identifiable areas of impairment, and associated health issues. No two children with Down syndrome are the same and children with Down syndrome exhibit many strengths which, when identified, can inform teaching approaches, pedagogy, and interventions. It is contended in the current research that to effectively teach children with Down syndrome, teachers need to understand what Down syndrome is, the associated learning profiles of children with Down syndrome, particular health and medical issues, as well as wider contextual information of family structure and communication issues (Cuskelly, 2005). By balancing the known health implications with the knowledge that all children are individuals with unique learning profiles, educational activities can be optimised to support children with Down syndrome.

A recent research focus has been on the development of a behavioural phenotype associated with Down syndrome (Davis, 2008; Fidler, 2005; Fidler & Nadel, 2007). A phenotype is any characteristic or trait that is observable and results from an expression of the genotype, which relates to the information carried with individual genes. Put simply, research focused on the development of a behavioural phenotype is trying to identify patterns of behavioural outcomes which are associated with Down syndrome throughout development. Fidler and Nadel (2007) highlight that work on behavioural phenotypes assists with a better understanding of the learning profile associated with Down syndrome. Behavioural phenotypes and the emerging understanding of them may contribute to significant understanding relating to the education of children with Down syndrome. In research undertaken with toddlers with Down syndrome it was noted that toddlers with Down syndrome do show emerging areas of strengths and weaknesses consistent with reported data in older children (Fidler, Hepburn, & Rogers, 2006). These identified areas of strengths were in the area of social skills with the weaknesses identified in expressive language and coordination (Fidler et al., 2006). These emerging understandings of a behavioural phenotype could contribute potentially useful information for educators working with children with Down syndrome.

There is debate in the literature about the importance of aetiology and its use in informing teachers regarding specific teaching strategies and the effectiveness in doing so in educational settings (Reilly, 2012). A review of key findings of five genetic syndromes including Down syndrome, found it is likely that knowledge

relating to the aetiological strengths and weakness of Down syndrome will assist in educators working with children with Down syndrome in school settings (Reilly, 2012). Reilly (2012) suggests the understanding of how aetiology may affect learning is useful for teachers to understand that aetiology can potentially affect learning. This understanding can assist teachers to anticipate potential areas for development in children's learning. How aetiological knowledge of Down syndrome and how it might inform teaching practices or behavioural interventions is not yet known (Reilly, 2012). Relying solely on aetiology is not advised as there is significant variance in Down syndrome and significant variance in individual learning profiles. However, in past research the value of teachers having knowledge of specific aetiology, and using this information in educational programs, has been disputed (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). In the current research it is posited that a balanced approach would yield the most successful educational outcomes because teachers would use a basic knowledge of children with Down syndrome's aetiology and characteristics to inform their teaching approach. However, this would be tempered with an underlying acknowledgment that all children are unique and have their own individual learning profiles. Acknowledging characteristics including health and syndrome specific implications for learning would better equip teachers for teaching learners with Down syndrome in their classrooms. The knowledge related to cognitive and behavioural profiles, even on a limited scale, may reduce misunderstandings of challenging behaviour, lack of engagement and learning implications.

2.4 EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TEACHING CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

It is difficult to say exactly how many children with Down syndrome attend general education classes in Queensland or Australia, as there are no recorded statistics that provide this information. Local peak bodies for Down syndrome in various states within Australia keep records of these children and what schools they attend. However, the shortcoming of these data is that these member-based organisations only record information about their constituents. These are not official records of school attendance, thus only a partial picture is known.

In 2003, Down syndrome was added to the category of 'psychiatric disability' by the Australian government. A psychiatric disability is described as having

clinically recognisable symptoms and behaviour patterns, which may include global or specific mental functions, and may be experienced with associated activity limitations and participation restrictions in various areas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). What is known, from government sources, is that around 89% of children with a disability, aged five years to fourteen years, are attending a school, with about 62% of those children in general education classes rather than in a separate, segregated class (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). It is also known that children in the psychiatric category, and children with intellectual and learning disabilities, are likely to experience more difficulty in school than other children with disabilities, such as physical disabilities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). These problems may be due to the fact that almost 70% of students in school who were in the psychiatric categories had learning difficulties and over half had social difficulties (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). There is very little information on how teachers are teaching children with Down syndrome in their class under the auspices of psychiatric disabilities.

Cognitive strengths and areas of weaknesses associated with Down syndrome feature heavily in Down syndrome research. Current understandings of a cognitive profile in people with Down syndrome have been tempered with acknowledged difficulties in the establishment of cognitive profiles (Couzens & Cuskelly, 2014). These difficulties relate to building a profile of cognitive abilities through the use of information which is considered to be typical of normal cognitive development, and subsequently what appears to be normal varies from those profiles (Couzens & Cuskelly, 2014). These comparisons with typically developing cognitive profiles, combined with comparison with other aetiological specific disabilities, and intellectual disability have been used in the determination of strengths and weaknesses associated with Down syndrome (Couzens & Cuskelly, 2014).

Children with Down syndrome display variations within the domain of visual-spatial processing, including strengths in visual memory, visual-motor integrations, and visual imitation (Fidler, 2005). For teachers, these variations present an opportunity to work with a strengths-based approach to teaching by capitalising on visual-spatial processing. Fidler and Nadel (2007) highlight that a profile that includes strengths in visual processing and implicit memory could inform educational approaches when working with children with Down syndrome. This can

be done through designing learning experiences and environments which are based on the strengths identified in research relating to children with Down syndrome.

Children with Down syndrome typically display some form of intellectual impairment, however, there is a significant variance in the intellectual impairment in individuals with Down syndrome (Davis, 2008). An identified strength in children with Down syndrome has included the area of visual learning (Abbeduto, 2003; Buckley, Bird, Sacks, & Archer, 2006). Visual short-term memory is also highlighted as an area of strength (Davis, 2008).

The area of verbal memory is considered to be an area of significant deficit for individuals with Down syndrome. Research indicates variation between individuals with Down syndrome in the domain of verbal memory is limited (Couzens, Cuskelly, & Haynes, 2011). Longitudinal data supports a specific learning difficulty for phonological memory beyond the intellectual impairment which is identified with Down syndrome (Couzens et al., 2011). Memory span has been linked to several language capabilities and has been identified as possibly contributing to the enhancement of language learning (Conners, Rosenquist, Arnett, Moore, & Hume, 2008). Research suggests that children with Down syndrome can improve their auditory verbal memory span with interventions (Conners et al., 2008). One identified reason for weakness in language development includes issues with the phonological loop in individuals with Down syndrome (Purser & Jarrold, 2005). Limits in verbal working memory are exhibited in individuals with Down syndrome and are well reported within Down syndrome research, however understanding remains limited about how this occurs (Purser & Jarrold, 2005). A relationship between language production and working memory has been established (Seung & Chapman, 2003). Chapman, Hesketh, and Kistler (2002) identified the role of verbal and visual working memory abilities in the development of language including both expressive and receptive language skills for individuals with Down syndrome.

Language profiles for individuals with Down syndrome indicate language difficulties when compared to children of matched mental age (Abbeduto et al., 2001). The nature of weakness in language domains shows variance between individuals with Down syndrome with variances from non-verbal, one or two word utterances or language abilities identified as particularly high level (Papagno & Vallar, 2001). There is an imbalance between receptive language and expressive

abilities (Chapman, Schwartz, & Kay-Raining Bird, 1991). Fidler and Nadel (2007) encourage educators to be aware of these identified imbalances in receptive and expressive language, and that these differences may be frustrating for the child with Down syndrome who can understand more than they can express.

Educators need to sensitively consider social and motivational consequences of language difficulties. To reduce frustration, which may result in children becoming unmotivated learners, educators need to minimise the "potential for negative experiences, while allowing the child with Down syndrome to benefit from the opportunity to build their speech, language and communication skills" (Fidler & Nadel, 2007, p. 266). The use of explicit teaching strategies has been associated with the development of phonemic awareness and the teaching of grammar (Hewitt, Hinkle, & Miccio, 2005; Kennedy & Flynn, 2003). Learning environments which contribute to rich and targeted language development prior to school and during school are associated with higher vocabulary, comprehension, functional receptive and expressive communication outcomes (Couzens & Cuskelly, 2014).

Research undertaken in England in the primary years of schooling chronicles the inclusion of students with Down syndrome (Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004). This research project focused on the inclusion of 18 pupils with Down syndrome in a primary school, and investigated ways in which students were included effectively as well as documenting how the school enacted inclusive practice. Outcomes from this study reveal that there is no one single approach that guarantees effective inclusion, but that there is a combination of three key factors which affect the successful inclusion of students with Down syndrome. These factors include: that teachers take a central role in the management of support and organisation of the students' daily educational experience; that the outcomes of inclusion are strongly influenced by the ways in which the staff interact with others within the classroom; and that the accessibility of the curriculum combined with the belief that the child is central to the learning process (Fox et al., 2004). These factors are explored in the current research in relation to teachers in the early years of schooling.

For inclusive education to be achieved, both in schools and the wider community, it is vital there is not a pessimistic attitude adopted of what students with disabilities can achieve (Gilmore et al., 2003). In a study conducted by Wishart and Manning (1996) of 231 trainee teachers and their attitudes towards the inclusion of

students with Down syndrome, a large proportion of the sample indicated they recognised the educational benefits of inclusion in regular classrooms. However, these trainee teachers had concerns about having a child with Down syndrome in their class. The research highlighted that the trainee teachers often had stereotypical views regarding the developmental milestones and functioning of people with Down syndrome. The results highlighted that while 82% of the respondents believed in the principles of inclusive education, only 1% of respondents considered themselves 'well' prepared for the inclusion of a child with Down syndrome into their setting. In stark contrast, 96% of the respondents thought that they were 'not very well' or 'not at all well' prepared for this situation (Wishart & Manning, 1996). One might surmise that having a limited understanding of Down syndrome these trainee teachers may well struggle to know how to support a child with Down syndrome in their class if they did not receive some training first. A study using a questionnaire method in Australia (Gilmore et al., 2003) with a group of 538 experienced teachers indicate a reasonably accurate knowledge of Down syndrome by the participants. The results were dissimilar to Wishart and Manning's study in 1996 and Gilmore et al. (2003) deduced this discrepancy could be due to the increased presence of individuals with Down syndrome in schools in recent years.

Rietveld (2008) investigated the experiences of two pairs of boys with and without Down syndrome in a study into contextual factors affecting inclusion during transitions from preschool to school. This New Zealand research used continuous narrative recordings in the settings. Rietveld's (2008) findings indicate that the experience of inclusion in the two early childhood settings was less optimal for the children with Down syndrome than for those who did not have Down syndrome. For example, the children with Down syndrome were not expected to maintain relationships with reciprocity with the other children in the class whereas the children without Down syndrome were (Rietveld, 2008). In addition, some of the interactions between the staff and children who had Down syndrome focused on the children's deficits, an approach that tends to exclude rather than include children with Down syndrome. Rietveld's (2008) work highlights a need to understand the complexity of educational contexts and the factors which impact on teachers and children in those contexts. The current research attempts to fill this gap by

considering multiple factors in the school environment that impact teachers' work with children who have Down syndrome.

An earlier quantitative American study focusing on students with Down syndrome from kindergarten to the 12th grade identified what teachers reported as being successful inclusive practices (Wolpert, 2001). Using questionnaires delivered to 189 teachers, teachers rated what they felt were the optimal learning arrangements, most effective materials, successful behavioural management strategies, as well as the best methods for assessment for working with students with Down syndrome. Findings reveal that individual instruction, small group instruction, and peer tutoring were considered the top three learning arrangements for working with children with Down syndrome (Wolpert, 2001). While this study offers teachers insights into what inclusive practices may be most appropriate for students with Down syndrome in American contexts, the current research builds on this research with an emphasis on qualitative data that describes the impact of context and social influences. There is a concern with Wolpert's (2001) study because it has a focus on individual instruction. This individual instruction could either indicate withdrawal from the classroom for individual work or the presence of a support person attached to the child for learning at all times. The routine removal of students from their classrooms and the constant presence of adults with children have been identified as working against the principles of belonging and inclusion within class communities (Erwin & Guintini, 2000). In contrast the current research explores interactions with students with Down syndrome as they participate as full class members.

In a study by York, von Fraunhofer, Turk, and Sedgwick (1999) focusing on three syndromes, including Down syndrome, 102 special school staff and 40 mainstream school staff completed questionnaires that explored awareness and knowledge about these syndromes. Despite the respondents of the survey displaying reasonably good awareness and knowledge of Down syndrome, all respondents expressed that they needed further training, including the need for more written material and case studies, to achieve more confidence in their teaching practices. Results from the respondents included 66% of teachers wanting more workshops, and 88% of the teachers wanted more information on managing children with these syndromes in an educational setting (York et al., 1999). A description of the literature on inclusive education in schools is provided in Section 2.9 of this thesis.

The most effective teaching/learning materials identified by Wolpert (2001) include the use of concrete materials, the use of computers, and the use of pencil and paper. The use of concrete materials, or hands on materials, has been identified as particularly useful for students with Down syndrome as there is a tendency for learning through doing and through the use of manipulation of familiar and concrete learning materials (Ashman & Elkins, 2009). For example, in lessons where counting is a focus, the introduction of real materials to count is extremely useful. This use of concrete materials is supported by Faragher's (2004) research into mathematics that identifies the use of calculators to be effective combined with direct teaching strategies, ensuring adequate time is given for learning concepts and consolidating newly acquired skills into learning for students with Down syndrome (Faragher, 2004; Wishart, 2000). The use of computers as the second most effective material identified by Wolpert (2001) could be due in part to the technological advances seen in the last decade. The invention of hand held devices, touch pads, and wireless devices have impacted the way curriculum is delivered in classrooms worldwide, but as yet there is little research done in this area.

2.5 ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

The area of motivation and engagement in learning for children with Down syndrome represents a pivotal role in learning and educational outcomes. An educational environment which offers appropriate cognitive stimulation, engaging learning activities, positive expectations of children's learning and other environmental factors may have the potential to increase levels of engagement for children with Down syndrome. Alternatively, factors such as illness, fatigue and associated health conditions may impede children with Down syndrome's motivation and engagement in learning. Deficits in motivation for individuals with Down syndrome have been identified as part of the behavioural phenotype of Down syndrome (Fidler, 2005). However, environmental conditions such as educational interactions and learning environments play a leading role in the engagement and motivation of children with Down syndrome. Motivation has been linked as an indicator of outcomes for children in a study which measured that persistence with tasks related to increased skills in reading and mathematics in later adolescence (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2009). While parent reports of their children with Down

syndrome consistently rate persistence and persistence of challenges as low, when matched with typically developing children of the same mental age, children with Down syndrome, in fact, display no differences (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2014). Respiratory issues and sleep complications experienced by children with Down syndrome may result in fatigue which is misinterpreted by teachers as low engagement in the classroom (Pandit & Fitzgerald, 2012).

How educators perceive children with Down syndrome and their engagement and learning is pivotal to the educational experiences of children with Down syndrome. Children with Down syndrome may display longer processing times for information which result in educators misreading this as passivity or low motivation in tasks (Goodman & Linn, 2003). Given that there is little research to support lower rates of motivation assumptions by teachers of low engagement in tasks are likely related to other contextual and environmental factors, or a misunderstanding of aetiology.

The engagement of children with Down syndrome in teaching and learning contexts relies on teachers' abilities to understand factors such as health conditions and cognitive delays which may impact the motivation and engagement of these learners. Also relevant to building engagement and motivation is the provision of understanding around the individual nature of learners with Down syndrome, and their strengths and weaknesses in learning. Educational planning which builds upon the child's interests and levels of skills in an incremental way will more likely engage the learner more fully (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2014). Combined with this, feelings of success in their learning will contribute to the child's self efficacy and well-being, in turn further increasing their engagement and motivation in learning (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2014). Learning approaches used by teachers which recognise engagement in learning as dependent on other factors such as health conditions, building on feelings of competence, the child's interests and skills, and incremental learning experiences are likely to be profoundly more successful for children with Down syndrome. Acknowledgement that motivation and engagement of learners with Down syndrome can be misinterpreted by teachers by lack of understanding of underlying causes of passivity or non-engagement is significant to optimising learning outcomes.

Teachers need to be cognisant of how to best enhance learning and what barriers to learning may be present for children with Down syndrome. It is known that children with Down syndrome engage in challenging behaviour at higher rates than typically matched peers, with this behaviour often labelled as stubborn and oppositional behaviour and as impulsivity (Pueschel, Myers, & Sustrova, 1996). Challenging behaviours present obstacles to learning in educational contexts for the child, and have implications for the teacher, as well as being the most likely cause of removal from general education settings (Feeley & Jones, 2006). Research has indicated that such challenging behaviour serves a function or a purpose, such as to avoid difficult activities, or to increase attention for the child (Wishart, 1998). For educators, noting the function challenging behaviours serve, with an understanding of underlying causes of the behaviour, could result in a reduction of the interference with teaching and learning.

In a study matching eight year old children with a normative sample, children with Down syndrome exhibited significantly higher rates in the emotional, behavioural, and attention domains (van Gameren-Oosterom, Fekkes, Buitendijk, Mohangoo, Bruil, & van Wouwe, 2011). Difficulties in social, attention and thought problems form obstacles in educational learning opportunities. Teachers aware of these challenges can build and assess realistic learning goals on an individual basis for learners with Down syndrome which are relevant to their interests and learning patterns. Early intervention in understanding and working with challenging behaviours helps provide learners with Down syndrome more optimal educational outcomes. Behavioural interventions, such as using an analytic approach to addressing the needs of learners with Down syndrome has been researched on a limited scale with optimistic results (Buckley, 2008; Feeley & Jones, 2008). Interventions associated with challenging behaviour with children with Down syndrome need to be adopted with awareness of the Down syndrome behavioural phenotype to ensure adequate focus on the known strengths and weaknesses of individuals with Down syndrome.

The area of social development when compared with other neuro-developmental disorders is considered to be an identified area of strength for children with Down syndrome (Davis, 2008). However, while children with Down syndrome may exhibit a strong desire to be involved in social interactions, the accompanying

social skills required for effective interactions are not necessary held (Guralnick, Connor, & Johnson, 2009). Combined with this, social interactions and the pursuance of them may be at the disadvantage of learning and cognitive tasks (Wishart, 2007). Protective factors in social development for children with Down syndrome have been reported as high levels of representational play and a strong interest in interacting socially which appears sufficient to overcome language difficulties and other developmental impairments (Guralnick, Connor, & Johnson, 2011). These protective factors specifically relate to studies undertaken in dyads where it has been found that when social situations become more complex, children with Down syndrome experienced more peer competence difficulties (Guralnick et al., 2011). In the fluid nature of a classroom, this may have implications for learners who need structure around social interactions and the skills to manage the complexity of engaging in evolving learning situations. The strong interest in social interactions found in the behavioural phenotype of children with Down syndrome appears to be useful in optimising educational experiences, however this must be coupled with an understanding that all learners will have their own learning profiles.

Teachers who use small group formations and peer tutoring arrangements to enable children to interact with peers has been identified as a successful learning strategy for enhancing learning for children with Down syndrome (Wolpert, 2001). In addition, how to facilitate peer interaction to effectively support children with Down syndrome in general education settings and how children with Down syndrome interact with peers in activities has been examined recently in literature (Dolva, Gustavsson, Borell, & Hemmingsson, 2011; Dolva, Hemmingsson, Gustavsson, & Borell, 2010). However, explorations of peer interaction as experienced by teachers and how they facilitate peer interaction with children with Down syndrome revealed this to be a challenging aspect of teachers' practice (Dolva et al., 2011). Teachers were noted to strategically arrange learning activities in groups to encourage peer interactions, teachers also required other peers to provide assistance for the student with Down syndrome. By focussing on acceptance for diversity teachers encouraged other students in facilitating peer interactions, and this was identified as working toward the aims of peer facilitation for children with Down syndrome in general education settings. Activities chosen based on the interest of the child had positive repercussions for the child’s level of engagement in tasks and also

increased participation with the classroom (Dolva et al., 2011). The higher level of engagement that was supported by peer interaction provided opportunities for students with Down syndrome to do activities together which the students with Down syndrome could not do on their own (Dolva et al., 2010). Increasing the level of engagement in tasks through learning experiences based on the interests of the student, and with peer co-operation, has been identified as a successful teaching strategy for children with Down syndrome.

The notion of belonging to a class or group and how it legitimises participation and involvement is a key component found in peer interaction for children with Down syndrome. Dolva et al. (2010) found that formal belonging for children with Down syndrome and other children, with and without disabilities in general education settings appears associated with high expectations and acceptance of diversity within a classroom group. This finding suggests that there is scope for teachers to increase the belonging of children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling through their teaching approaches. How teachers do this and what are teachers' experiences of doing this is not fully known, with the current research aiming to contribute understanding in this area.

In terms of social interactions with others it has been identified that children with Down syndrome, in comparison to typically developing peers, have a more limited repertoire of play, are less likely to be the initiators of play, and engage in more stereotypic and repetitive acts during play (Krakow & Kopp, 1983). Repetitive play can be characterised by engagement in play over and over again, for example, the bathing of a doll over and over again. Krakow and Kopp (1983) interpreted these repetitive acts of play as “regressive and inflexible” and as “limiting the object and social resources available” (pp. 1152-1153). However, further research by Lender, Goodman, and Linn (1998) into repetitive activity in the play of children with Down syndrome and typically developing children found otherwise. While Lender et al. (1998) agree that children with Down syndrome engage in more repetitive activity, they found that the quality of repetitive and non-repetitive play was similar, explaining that repetitive play may serve some constructive purposes for children including knowledge construction, mastery, and integration.

For educators, understanding the nature of children's play in the early years of schooling has implications. For example, the temptation to intervene in a child

engaging in repetitive play could be seen as warranted and educators may be tempted to constantly redirect the play. Lender et al.'s (1998) findings, however, highlight that repetitive play is not necessarily unproductive, and may in fact be assisting as a rehearsal and mastery strategy. Play, in the context of educational settings, has been used but frequently with the intention that through play the teaching of play skills will occur (Jobling, 1996). Of concern here is that play is not merely a vehicle for children with Down syndrome to identify and achieve a list of developmental tasks, but rather engagement in play should be seen as an intended source of pleasure and enjoyment as well as learning (Jobling, 1996).

Research with children with Down syndrome in the area of social competence have reported teachers describing children with Down syndrome as being hyperactive, more distractible, and less pro-social than typically developing children matched on mental age (Guralnick et al., 2011). This has implications for the children's ability to engage in sustained play, particularly when the play is of an unstructured nature. Research carried out on children with Down syndrome and their mothers in the home environment has identified issues regarding play with their children with matched mental age groups including less well-developed linkages between playmates, less involvement with playmates during play, and less control exerted over the play by children with Down syndrome (Guralnick et al., 2009).

The issue of social competence indicates that children with special educational needs are often socially excluded, have fewer relationships and participate less in groups within the classroom (Pijl, Frostad, & Flem, 2008). The nature of social competence as a strength for children with Down syndrome has not been actively researched in terms of the how this transfers into quality friendships within the schooling context. Understanding classroom settings and the teachers' role in assisting in the establishment of children with Down syndrome and their peer social networks are important considerations (Guralinick et al., 2011). Teachers who appear aware of children with Down syndrome as exhibiting peer interaction difficulties are described as more proactive in their supportive efforts including assisting children to initiate and maintain play, as well as understanding the basic rules and structure of social play (Guralinick et al., 2011).

2.6 TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME IN THE EARLY YEARS OF SCHOOLING

Historically, specialist staff and specialist support staff were responsible for children with additional needs. This support may have been in a special education unit at the school, support models within schools or through withdrawal programs. The movement to inclusive education has changed this older paradigm of working with students who have disabilities; teachers may be responsible for the planning and provision of education programs for all children either solely or in collaboration with specialist support. This expectation situates teachers as pivotal in the process of inclusive education. Indeed, teachers have been described as 'front-line' workers in models of inclusive education (Forlin, 1998; Westwood & Graham, 2003). Ways teachers have been able to teach within this challenge is a function of individual difference. The current research explores these individual differences in an attempt to add to the body of information which will inform future teachers' practice, particularly for teachers teaching children with Down syndrome.

It has been identified that teachers set the tone for their classrooms and that the success of inclusion may depend on the attitudes of teachers as they interact with students with disabilities in their classrooms (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003). A recent Australian research report found that teachers are moderately supportive of including students with a disability in their general classrooms (Shaddock et al., 2007). It has been identified that teachers generally feel more positive about the social benefits to children than academic benefits, and as part of their day-to-day teaching teachers are already making a moderate number of teaching adaptations for students with disabilities in their classrooms (Shaddock et al., 2007). These teaching adaptations include strategies such as the use of peer assistance in class, adapted worksheets, flexible use of resources and human resources, differentiation strategies, the use of technology and parental support (Shaddock et al., 2007). However, Watson (2004) has identified teachers as feeling isolated, frustrated, and being overburdened while working with students with identified learning difficulties. Westwood and Graham (2003) reported a significant number of teachers surveyed had received no in-service training and yet were still expected to cater for students with disabilities in their classes.

While a systematic review of literature from year 2000 through 2013 has revealed little empirical literature relating to the experiences of teachers teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling, the following section reviews contemporary understandings of what is known about this teaching situation.

A Belgium study where general education teachers collaborated with parents including parents of children with Down syndrome identified several implications for inclusive practice (Mortier, Hunt, Desimpel, & Van Hove, 2009). Inclusive practices reported on by teachers included the implementation of collaborative partnerships between teachers, parents and support staff to maximise the educational goals for the children in their classes. Combined with this, it was noted that practical and feasible actions of which teachers and parents were the creators, were most likely to be implemented by teachers in their classrooms and be effective (Mortier et al., 2009). Some of these identified actions included increased teacher proximity to the child in learning groups, visual outlines of tasks, the use of concrete materials, pairing the child with a buddy and using reward systems (Mortier et al., 2009). Regular meetings with parents and a positive strengths-based approach to planning and collaboration was found to greatly impact the success of the teacher, and subsequently outcomes for the child in their class (Mortier et al., 2009).

Johnson (2006) found that teachers felt apprehension regarding including students with Down syndrome into their classrooms, with particular concerns relating to how the children with Down syndrome would progress thorough their schooling years. Teachers reported negative attitudes towards inclusion as they believed the curriculum was not relevant to these students. Combined with this, teachers' reported feeling generally apprehensive about whether they had the capacity to meet their learning needs. At the end of a 5 year period of data collection however, all teachers except one had commented more positively, responding that the students had exceeded their expectations and that having a child with Down syndrome in the class had many benefits to the other children in the class. The one teacher who returned negative responses after teaching a child with Down syndrome focused mainly on the curriculum and levels of support available to teachers (Johnson, 2006). Teachers reported on the importance of support which predominantly referred to human support personnel.

Early childhood teachers' perceptions and experiences of including children with disabilities in mainstream programs designed for typically developing children was included in the review as a proportion of the children in the setting included children with Down syndrome (Huang & Diamond, 2009). A quasi-experimental design was used to compare the responses of early childhood teachers (N = 155 teachers) when discussing the inclusion of a child with a disability in their classrooms. Teachers were asked to respond to vignettes and comment on their teacher comfort levels, classroom adaptations, and need for support and the use of a categorical disability label. The findings revealed that teachers' responses were strongly related to the description of the child's learning needs (Huang & Diamond, 2009). Teachers reported being most comfortable with teaching a child who needed the least amount of support and classroom adaptation, in this case the child with a physical disability. Given that these responses from teachers were given in response to vignettes on children with disabilities, and not actual classroom experience or practice, some caution needs be exercised with the findings.

Wolpert's (2001) study presented general educators' responses about students with Down syndrome in educational settings, including the early years of schooling. However, this was a quantitative ranking of learning arrangements, learning materials, behaviour management strategies and included teacher recommendations for improvement. What is not known from Wolpert's research and what the current research explores, is the experiences of teachers as told through their own words. For example, it is not known how the teachers in Wolpert's study viewed children as learners; this area is a strong feature in the current research.

Two studies reviewed findings which the present research project can build upon (Fox et al., 2004; Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly, & Dempsey, 2013). One finding was that a key factor in the success of teachers included taking full ownership of the education of the learner with Down syndrome in their class (Fox et al., 2004), which included teachers not being reliant on the teacher assistant to be directly working with the child with Down syndrome and allowing the child to participate more fully in the class. Pre-planning with teaching assistants in respect to how their assistance was to be used within the class was also found to be effective. The relationship between the teaching assistant and teacher was found to have a major impact on the effectiveness of support arrangements for the children with Down syndrome (Fox et

al., 2004). Effective support was characterised by collaborative partnerships between staff. In Thailand, for example, teachers' views of inclusive education for young children with disabilities, including children with Down syndrome, highlights the importance of collaborative partnerships as supporting effective inclusion (Sukbunpant et al., 2013). In this study, however, there were concerns raised by teachers about ineffectual managerial support from principals, and teachers reported further challenges such as a lack of confidence and lack of specified special education training.

It can be observed there is a distinct lack of literature relating to the experiences of teachers teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. Contemporary understandings of teachers' experiences in Australia represent a large gap in the knowledge base. There are reported studies on particular interventions in terms of literacy, numeracy, playground use and social interactions, however, teachers' experiences are not widely represented. There is little teacher voice in the literature about the education of children with Down syndrome. How teachers perceive children with Down syndrome as learners is unclear in general education settings in the early years of schooling. This knowledge is critical though to engage in discussions about the effectiveness of education for young children with Down syndrome, and this is where the current research contributes to the existing literature.

2.7 A FOCUS ON TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

As stated above, teachers are widely regarded as pivotal to the success of inclusive education. It has been argued that it is teachers themselves, and not wider legislation who are the cornerstone of the success of inclusive education (Forlin, Keen, & Barrett, 2008). The recognition that teachers are critical to the success of inclusive education warrants a focus on documenting teachers' experiences. Teachers are required to teach to diversity, and to do it effectively. Researching teachers' experiences gives voice to the supports and challenges which enable teachers to teach effectively. Literature has indicated the possibility that teachers are not prepared enough for teaching in inclusive schools however, limited research has been conducted in this area (Booth, Nes, & Stromstad, 2003; Morton & Gordon, 2006). Additionally little has been reported on how well teachers are prepared, or not, for having a student with Down syndrome in their classroom. There is also little

information relating to how teachers' experience teaching children with Down syndrome, including what supports they have and what challenges they face.

Confusing pictures of how teachers feel about inclusive education generally are evident in the literature. For example, teachers' attitudes appear to vary according to the type of disability of the child they are teaching (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). There is evidence that teachers hold negative views about the inclusion of children with learning disabilities, behavioural issues, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder but that teachers are more receptive to the inclusion of children with mild disabilities, physical disabilities, and/or sensory disabilities, as opposed to what teachers may consider are more complex needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers have reported concerns over their abilities to teach a whole group of children effectively when teaching a child in their class with a disability, citing a reduced capacity to tend to the whole class when focusing on a student with a disability in their classrooms (Forlin, Keen, & Barrett, 2008). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that teachers seemingly endorse the principles of inclusive education but would rather it was not them having to enact it in their classrooms (de Boer et al., 2011). What is clear is that teachers are seen as key stakeholders in inclusive education and so understanding teachers' experiences is a critical part of how inclusive education is enacted and understood (Meijer, 2003; Norwich, 1994). With so little known about this area, it is necessary to ask teachers directly about their perspectives and experiences in relation to having a student with a disability in their class, and how these experiences relate to the principles of inclusion. This aim is further refined in the current research which specifically questions how teachers experience teaching a child with Down syndrome in their general education setting.

Research indicates that teachers have very real practical concerns about inclusive education (Burke & Sutherland 2004; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), which can impact on teachers' feelings of confidence in the classroom. This preoccupation with teachers' feelings and their perceived levels of competence to impact their students' learning in positive ways is not new. The body of research surrounding this area relates to what is known as teachers efficacy. Teacher efficacy can be defined as the confidence that teachers have about how well they can influence their students' learning (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Bandura (1977) highlighted that threats to teachers' perceived efficacy influence the environment in which they teach as well as

their decisions about what and how they will teach. A teacher's sense of efficacy affects both their behaviour and their actions (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). What is significant with teacher efficacy is that it is cyclical in nature. This cyclicality means that proficiency or positive feelings about an achievement then create a new mastery experience, which then works to raise the teacher's efficacy further (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). When this construct is explored in inclusive education, researchers have identified that teachers with high teacher efficacy are a key driver in the creation of successful inclusive classrooms (Sharma et al., 2011). Findings from a study in South African and Finnish primary and secondary education contexts concluded that the more teachers believe they are able to implement inclusive practices on a pragmatic level, the more positive their attitudes towards inclusion are (Savolainen et al., 2012).

Even though teachers are critical to the success of inclusive education they do not hold all the responsibility. Teachers can be either empowered or disempowered through their school community. For teachers to reflect an inclusive environment in their classrooms with inclusive teaching approaches and practices, their wider school context needs to be organised in a way that facilitates this (Ferguson, 2008). The way teachers and special education teachers work together within schools is one area that requires attention. Overcoming decades of separateness between special education and general education settings is a challenge for teachers, as new roles and relationships need to be forged in pursuit of a more inclusive approach (Ferguson, 2008). This reorganising of roles and working arrangements can be difficult for general education teachers, as they try to find common ground among the staff responsible for the students with disabilities, and how their responsibility plays out within the classroom and the school.

This issue over responsibility for the child is central to the effective inclusion of children with disabilities. The gap between effective and ineffective inclusion could lie, in part, in teachers' beliefs about who has responsibility of the child with special education needs (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). According to Jordan et al. (2009) when teachers see the responsibility for all of their students as their primary role, the teacher is more likely to develop effective instructional techniques for all of their students. Where there is conflict, or a lack of clarity, about who is responsible for the students' needs, for example where a special education

teacher or a learning support officer is involved, the teacher may not feel as responsible and, as such, does not always develop their existing skill set. To counter this confusion, opportunities for teachers to reflect on their beliefs in a supportive context may instigate a positive change in beliefs and attitudes that can lead to more effective teacher practices with their students (Jordan et al., 2009).

Having a high sense of agency in teaching or the belief that their actions can influence their context has impacts for teachers (Hokka, Etelapelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012). Agency is commonly defined as the capacity for intentional acts (Bandura, 1977). Teachers who position themselves as being agentive will actively seek out solutions to issues and believe in their capacity to change things for the better. Teachers' sense of agency can be constrained or constructed within their socio-cultural contexts (Hokka et al., 2012). A high sense of agency in a teacher's practice would be characterised by their ability or capacity to carry out their teaching in respect of their individual intentions, whilst still adhering to the social constructs in their contexts (Hokka et al., 2012). High levels of agency see teachers as active in their contexts, while lower levels of teacher agency could be characterised by more passive approaches, including maintaining the discourses and organisational structures which are in play within their contexts. In inclusive education where there is a need for collaboration and the use of flexible pedagogical approaches, a high sense of teacher agency is useful.

Research conducted in Australia has shown that there are insufficient funds available for professional development to up-skill teachers for working with students who have disabilities, and also insufficient funds to cover teacher relief, travel and support (Shaddock et al., 2007). For teachers working with children with Down syndrome it is unknown how successful professional development is in informing the practice of general education teachers working with them. It is also the case that the implementation of a standards-based agenda and new Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) mean teachers are working in a period of change. A change to the Australian Curriculum provides new language and potential teaching practices for teachers to learn in relation to inclusive education. How teachers conceptualise this change in relation to teaching children who have Down syndrome is a focus for the current research. The introduction of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) will be discussed more fully in Section 2.9.

2.8 INCLUSIVE TEACHING APPROACHES FOR CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

The pedagogy of teachers, or their teaching practices, influence the way children are included successfully within classrooms. Lewis and Norwich (2000) investigated the pedagogy for children with learning difficulties, including children with Down syndrome, and they concluded that what is successful for these students, would in fact work for all students. Significant to the current research, Lewis and Norwich suggested that teachers value pedagogies based on the recognition of individual learning needs which they called 'unique differences' (Lewis & Norwich, 2000). A similar study in the United Kingdom focuses on the importance of connecting with individual learners and making learning experiences meaningful, and this was identified as being useful in inclusive education (Corbett, 2001).

Understanding that diversity exists not only within each individual but within disability groups is key to effective teaching approaches. A synthesis of research conducted in New Zealand (Alton-Lee, 2003) indicated that teaching that is responsive to student diversity impacts positively on all the students in the class. Alton-Lee (2003) identifies ten characteristics that effective teachers used in their inclusive classrooms. These characteristics include quality teaching with a focus on student achievement, pedagogical practices that enable classes to work as cohesive communities, effective links between schools and other cultural contexts, and teaching being responsive to students' learning. Further characteristics were identified as teachers giving opportunities to learn that are effective and sufficient, multiple task contexts to support learning, and aligning curriculum goals and resources. Also important in effective teaching is the opportunity for scaffolding teaching approaches that provide feedback to the student, teaching approaches that promote learning orientations, and the need for teachers and students to engage constructively in goal-oriented assessment (Alton-Lee, 2003).

Within the literature there are general strategies identified as being successful in including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. McDonnell, Thorson, Disher, Mathot-Buckner, Mendel, and Ray (2003) identify strategies that teachers use to support students with disabilities include peer tutoring, large and small group instruction, individual instruction, co-operative learning, and co-teaching with the special educator teacher. Barriers to individualised adjustments given by

teachers for children with disabilities include that inclusion is time consuming, simplifying lessons slows the pace for other learners, using different approaches and resources can highlight differences, a lack of awareness of what to do, and a lack of training and school support for teachers (Westwood & Graham, 2003). These identified areas appear to indicate that teachers need more assistance in order to better support children with disabilities in their classrooms.

Teachers who are successful in including students with disabilities in general education classes have been found to routinely collaborate with colleagues, parents, and other students to deliver a differentiated curriculum (Shaddock et al., 2007). Planning effectively and taking a reflective approach to problem solving, combined with capitalising on the strengths and interests of each student has been found in the practice of teachers successful in including students with disabilities into general education classes (Shaddock et al., 2007). Other successful practices include the use of teaching assistants as an integral part of the team, giving clear guidance and direction to those assistants, and fostering good relationships with school personnel and with home (Shaddock et al., 2007).

Collaboration with other staff places teachers in a role that involves not only teaching students, but also positions teachers as being effective managers within their classrooms, successfully facilitating collaboration with other staff. The added pressure of supervising a team of extra support personnel and the lack of time to teach students with a disability has been identified as most challenging to teachers' inclusion of students with disabilities (Shaddock et al., 2007). Given that collaboration with support staff and other colleagues facilitates successful inclusion, it is important to garner teachers' experiences managing support staff, and how they build and facilitate these relationships.

Teachers who are successful in effectively carrying out inclusive education are focused on a range of strategies that they can implement to meet individual student's needs. The language used to describe what changes are made differs, and includes terms such as differentiation, adaptations, or modifications. The foundational element however is the same and is built on a responsiveness to the needs of all learners (Hoover & Patton, 2008). Ensuring curriculum is more engaging and meaningful to the student is a key facet, as is personalising learning for each student and creating a community of learners who support and share in each other's learning

(Ferguson, 2008). Strategies such as differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2003) involve teachers thinking about different ways lessons or tasks can be presented which may meet the learners' needs in better ways. Differentiation also takes into account the students' level of abilities, their interests and their learning styles (Ferguson, 2008; Tomlinson, 2003). Teachers need to be aware first of differentiation strategies, and second feel comfortable with using them for students with disabilities within their classrooms. What strategies teachers use, and how they have come to know and use them with regards to teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling, is not known. The current research study contributes findings in this area.

The decisions teachers make regarding teaching a child with Down syndrome in their classrooms are critical. These decisions, made by teachers about what to teach and their chosen teaching approach, are the key determinants of student outcomes, only superseded by the impacts of the students themselves (Hattie, 2012). These decisions are based on how teachers view children with Down syndrome and how this is influenced by wider constructions of Down syndrome as a disability. Schools in Queensland today operate under an inclusive education approach. What this approach is and what this means for inclusion of children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling is discussed below.

2.9 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

This research is about teachers' experiences in relation to teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. Given that the discourse surrounding inclusive education has continued for decades, it is timely to explore the experiences of teachers in general education classrooms who have been charged with implementing inclusive practices. How the implementation of inclusive education policy and the new Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) affect teachers' work in classrooms are areas to which this research contributes.

There is no universally accepted definition of inclusion. Characteristics of a more inclusive approach in teaching and learning are built on several principles. These include the need for education systems to accommodate diversity in the school population, the need to provide a child-centred pedagogy; and the recognition that every student has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs

(UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education is difficult to quantify; perhaps this difficulty in identifying what inclusive education is, contributes to a lack of cohesion for teachers about how to implement inclusive practices. The following section identifies features of inclusive education found in the literature.

Different authors interpret 'inclusion' differently. These variations are based on individual interpretations, policies, frameworks, school, and cultural factors (Nutbrown, Clough, & Selbie, 2008). For example, Foreman (2008) identifies integral components of inclusion for teachers that include how they embrace student diversity, demonstrate flexibility in learning experiences, and create classrooms that seek to benefit all students in the class. Ashman and Elkins (2012) discuss inclusion in a context of students' belonging, and of having equal rights and qualities. To broaden the definition of inclusion and connect it with philosophy, Carrington (2000) has highlighted that inclusion is a philosophy of acceptance where all people are valued and treated with respect. Ballad (1997) defines an inclusive school as an ordinary part of human experience - to be valued and organised for - and continues by identifying exclusionary practices such as those that define differentness as being not ordinary, and by implication, not valuable.

Inclusive education seemingly is built on the premise that all students belong and are accepted no matter what their background. Diversity abounds in our society (Corbett & Slee, 2000) and as such, inclusive education is not just the recognition of difference but also the celebration of difference and diversity. Of particular note is that difference and diversity are not other ways of explaining a defect in a student that needs to be addressed by the teacher or school but rather it is a celebration of the student as they are (Branson & Miller, 2002). Slee (2003) suggests that inclusive education is listening to and empowering all members in a schooling community, to indentify and dismantle actual and potential sources of exclusion. As the current research has a focus on teaching, it is relevant also to look at a definition of inclusion in terms of how it relates to pedagogy and teaching. Shaddock et al. (2007) define inclusive practice as involving collaboration with others, drawing on existing pedagogical and content knowledge, creativity, resourcefulness and confidence, trialling new ways of teaching, and reflecting on the outcomes. Researchers, including van Kraayenoord, Elkins, Palmer, and Rickards (2000) refer to inclusive

education as "the practice of providing for students with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds and aspirations in regular school settings" (p. 9).

Clearly, from the literature reviewed above, there is significant onus on teachers with regards to inclusive education. Teachers are required to collaborate with others, be resourceful, confident and be risk takers within their classrooms. They are also required to challenge potential sources of exclusion and promote equity within their classroom communities. The current research explores how teachers do this in their own classrooms and proposes that some teachers will feel more able to work in inclusive ways and, consequently, the way they view children with Down syndrome will differ. The current research contributes to a greater understanding of the demands placed on teachers in the early years of schooling and how teachers balance these demands.

The definition of inclusion used in the current study, draws on the definitions considered above, and is as follows:

> *Inclusive education is about acceptance of individual children and their families as they are, with a firm commitment to actively supporting their needs. Inclusion is not just placing a child physically in a general education class; it is much more than the physical presence of the child. Above all, inclusion is about belonging, about school communities owning, valuing and supporting each and every child to succeed.*

2.9.1 Inclusion in the Australian Context

Teachers working in Australian schools are guided by overarching educational policy. The principles inherent to inclusive education in Australia are framed by the *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) which has seen a transformative effect on education, influencing both policy and legislation. The guiding, affirmative, and distinguishable principles of this statement specifically highlight a unification of attitudes supporting the inclusion of all children in mainstream schooling as an effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and building an inclusive society (UNESCO, 1994). This document has guided Australian educational policy and assisted in the development of crucial documents impacting inclusive education in Australia, such as the *Disability Standards for Education* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005).

Other documents providing impetus for inclusive education in Australia have included *The Adelaide Declaration* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 1999), which is now superseded by the *Melbourne Declaration* (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), 2008). These documents outline a commitment to a goal of achieving high quality schooling for all young Australians regardless of disability (MCEECDYA, 2008). *The Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* acknowledges that "education equips young people with the knowledge, understanding, skills and values to take advantage of opportunity and to face the challenges of this era with confidence" (MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 4). It further outlines a set of educational goals for young Australians with a firm commitment to diversity, including those students with disabilities.

Along with the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEECDYA, 2008), other significant documents at the national level include the establishment of *The National Quality Framework*, (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2013), which encompasses the National *Early Years Learning Framework* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), and provides a national approach to quality and regulation in the early years. Of further note in Australia is the development for the first time, of a set of national curriculum documents in the form of the *Australian Curriculum Documents* (ACARA, 2010). The *Australian Curriculum Documents* (ACARA, 2010) acknowledge the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals* (MCEECDYA, 2008) and set goals for teachers, regarding the promotion of equity and excellence through education, and the development of all students in becoming successful learners (ACARA, 2013). Teachers are seen as crucial in implementing these policies and frameworks.

Despite the work providing impetus for inclusive education, teachers still have many concerns over the implementation of inclusive policy and practices. Forlin, Douglas, and Hattie (1996) have observed in the Australian context that the reality of inclusion is reflected in the attitudes and skills of classroom teachers. Shaddock et al. (2007) describe a misalignment between legal mandates and policy development, with the beliefs and concerns of teachers not being abated. Further pressures on teachers include the implementation of a new curriculum with new wording and

ideology. As a result of these identified pressures, there is a real concern that teachers will continue to feel isolated and under pressure within their classrooms. Of particular relevance to the current research is the legislation and policies at the state level in Queensland, under which teachers in the current research work. The next section outlines the view on disability in legislation and policy in the Queensland context.

2.9.2 Inclusion in the Queensland Context

Legislation and policies developed at a national and international level have framed the development and delivery of inclusive education policy in Queensland. These policies have impacted heavily on the enrolment of students with Down syndrome into general education settings, and their opportunity to have equal access to the curriculum. These policies also guide the implementation of inclusive education for teachers and frame teachers' working conditions.

Queensland educational policy in the last decade has undergone a significant transformation period of reform and renewal. Significant initiatives which have given impetus to inclusivity in education in Queensland schools have included a *Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (students with disabilities)* (DETE, 2004). One of recommendations made by the taskforce was to establish a Ministerial Advisory Committee to develop an Inclusive Education Statement. The resulting statement was delivered through the auspices of *The Inclusive Education Statement* (DETE, 2005). Framing the statement was a quote from Roger Slee (2005) outlining, "Inclusive education is for everybody and is everybody's business." This quote draws attention to the notion of inclusive education affecting all, however with an underpinning assumption that all stakeholders will be familiar with the tenets of inclusive education.

The *Inclusive Education Statement* (DETE, 2005) comprises four integral components including a definition of what inclusive education means in Education Queensland; a commitment by Education Queensland to inclusive education; indicators of inclusive education; and finally valuing and responding to diversity. These four components influence the ways in which teachers work with regard to inclusive education. The expectations set out in the *Inclusive Education Statement* (DETE, 2005) for teachers are that they will work at maximising the educational and

social outcomes of all students, reduce barriers to learning, foster diversity among their classrooms, and build relationships and communities that challenge social injustice. On a systems level, Education Queensland is required through this policy to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to improve their ability to understand diversity and to build effective partnerships that support the goals of inclusive education. There is also a requirement to disseminate information about effective cases of inclusive education with teachers.

However, despite this outlining of policy processes, there appears to be a lack of specificity regarding its implementation by teachers working in classrooms. At the 'coal face' in classrooms, there will be teachers who struggle with the concept of embracing diversity and inclusive practices or struggle with the realities of differentiating their curriculum and teaching practices to engage all learners (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010). The current research contributes to understanding how teachers are working to teach children with a disability in their early years teaching contexts. Inclusive education policy has outlined the need to provide teachers with case studies of practices. These case studies can be used to share with other teachers as part of professional development in learning more about how to work with children who have disabilities; the current research contributes directly to this area.

In Queensland schools, students with disability are supported through the Education Adjustment Program (EAP), which is a process designed to identify and respond to the needs of students with a disability (DETE, 2012). The EAP process involves an ongoing cycle of data collection, planning, program development, intervention, evaluation, and review (DETE, 2012). To be eligible for support, students need to be identified in one or more of six disability categories. These disability categories include Autism Spectrum Disorder, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Impairment, Physical Impairment, Speech-Language Impairment, and Vision Impairment. The process of confirming a student meets one of these categories is called verification (DETE, 2012). The verification includes gathering data on the impairment and the educational impact of the impairment. Non-state schools also use this process of EAP. In reference to the current research, when teachers discuss a 'verification' or 'verified through the department' they are referring to having been through this process in relation to a specific student. This information

from the EAP is then considered when allocating resources for students with verified disabilities. The various educational regions are responsible for distribution of these resources. Some of the resourcing given to schools may involve the supply of personnel including specialist teachers, teacher aides or administrative staff.

The relevance of discussing this identification and resourcing model for the current research is that, despite teachers working within the auspices of an inclusive education policy, the resourcing and support models for children with disabilities are still heavily structured in line with a focus on deficits located within the students. It is argued in the current research that this focus on deficits located within the child impacts the way teachers view children with disabilities.

A recent Government report called *More Support for Students with Disabilities* (MSSWD) (DETE, 2012) has outlined additional education funding over the forthcoming years, to assist teachers to be more inclusive and to improve the educational outcomes of students with disability. Areas of focus for the MSSWD include how to improve the skills of teachers in curriculum differentiation and developing curriculum resources, improving and sustaining the skills of teachers, and building and enhancing school capability and leadership (DETE, 2012). This places the current research clearly in line with current Government agendas and reflections on resourcing and support models, as well as how best to improve teachers working toward inclusive approaches.

Within Queensland schools there are various structures that support students with disabilities. These include school based special education programs. A special education program is described as a cluster of resources including special education teachers and support staff together in the one school (DETE, 2012). Some program specialisations can be found in schools in the areas of the verification categories. How these programs are used or not used is decided within schools or within clusters of schools. Some schools may provide a special education classroom; some might support children within the classroom with specialised lessons as needed. There is variance in how these programs are operated. For the current research it was a requirement that the child with Down syndrome was located in a general education classroom.

2.9.3 Variables Associated with Inclusive Schooling

The early years of schooling are recognised as a critical period in a child's schooling (Pendergast & Danby, 2012). Inclusive education has been identified as generally more successful with younger children. The reasons for this success include higher rates of family support and interaction, generally more accommodating environments, early childhood staff training focusing on individual needs, and the responsive environments that characterise early childhood contexts (North & Carruthers, 2008).

The importance of school culture in inclusive education has been researched (Carrington, 1999), and the interaction between school culture and inclusive practices has been established (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The ideology of inclusive education, and its subsequent inclusive practices, has been defined as a new way of perceiving education (Mitchell, 2005). A key element of this ideology is the expectation that resourcing and support models will provide for students with disabilities within the regular classroom. Indeed, a primary implication for practice in inclusive education is the creation of and maintenance of support systems within schools that support teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

One of the most important aspects of inclusion within a school can be the leadership shown by the principal and his/her beliefs about inclusive education. Leaders of schools that facilitate teachers and other staff to engage in discussion about their beliefs and practices regarding inclusive education are more likely to encourage teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners in an inclusive culture (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). The beliefs the principal holds about inclusive education have been identified as critically important to the implementation and sustainability of inclusive educational practices (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012). An organisational culture that reflects inclusive education requires commitment to the resourcing and support models that underpin the philosophical values of inclusive education (Porter, 1995). Schools that develop a community culture that values and respects all in that community are more likely to adopt an inclusive approach (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). Therefore, the researcher asserts that in schools where principals are not committed to upholding inclusive education, teachers are more likely to struggle with inclusion and the acceptance of diversity. How support from principals affects teachers' beliefs and daily classroom practices directly is

explored in the current research through discussions with teachers about their experiences.

Booth and Ainscow (2002) identify four main areas that characterise inclusive schools which include: an inclusive learning culture where collaboration is a feature; the implementation of inclusive policies; commitment to supporting diversity; and finally, inclusive education practices in terms of its teaching and resourcing for teachers (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Identified threats to inclusive education include inflexible resourcing structures and unresponsive funding regimes constructed on deficit model ideology (Higgins, MacArthur, & Rietveld, 2006). Schools that focus on deficits in children, and how teachers can remediate these deficits, are less likely to have an inclusive education approach.

It is acknowledged that inclusive education is a complex and fluid concept. It relies on the alignment of several processes rooted within educational structures, policy, and practices commensurate with the key principle of social justice and human rights (Ballard, 2004; Higgins et al., 2006; Slee, 2001). Schools that clearly regard all students as full and active members of the school community are much more successful in inclusive education (Nakken & Pijl, 2002).

2.9.4 Inclusion and Diversity

The recently introduced Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) has heralded a watershed arrival and introduction of Australia's first ever National Curriculum. What is interesting to note in these new documents is that the terms inclusion and inclusive education are not evident. There is however, a focus on diversity and diverse learners. A focus on diversity is also reflected in the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (MCEECDYA, 2008). The potential impact of this change in language could add to confusion for teachers regarding their roles in inclusive education. It is contended by the researcher that large philosophical shifts in policy documents must be communicated with teachers if they are to work within the policy frameworks. Teachers need knowledge about what these policies mean in relation to their teaching on a day-to-day basis. The current research study is timely as it captures this significant change in policy context and provides an opportunity for a deeper understanding of how teachers are experiencing this change in relation to their own work.

The shift in rhetoric about inclusive education to a focus more on diversity has provided some tensions. Ashman and Elkins (2012) discuss an inherent tension between the concepts of inclusion and diversity. They argue that inclusion is about belonging and the placement of people and characteristics of the group, whilst diversity is about difference (Ashman & Elkins, 2012). Definitions appear to be mixed when combining the terms inclusion and diversity (Zepke, 2005). The term inclusion is used by Sharma et al. (2011) based on a philosophy that all students are different in a number of ways and not just limited to disability. This sounds a lot like diversity and perhaps as diversity has its origins firmly sitting under the umbrella of the inclusive education movement this is the reason for the cross over in usage. Usage of the term diversity, without fully understanding its complexities and multi-faceted nature, has been highlighted as an area of concern (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2010). This concern is investigated in the current research which contributes by asking teachers how they conceptualise children with Down syndrome as learners in their classrooms. Their responses provide an understanding of how teachers currently working in classrooms understand the nature of diversity, which in turn can inform future understandings of diversity for teachers.

There is debate about whether the focus on diversity ignores impairment (Abberley, 1992) and whether disability can be adequately catered for under this model (Talay-Ongan, 2004). Concerns have been raised over the risk that children with disabilities will become invisible, isolated, and excluded if the nature of their disability is not acknowledged (Higgins et al., 2006). There is also a concern that ignoring impairment issues may lead to a loss of opportunity for constructive discussions about disability (Higgins et al., 2006). These issues are significant for teachers. Catering for diversity within the classroom without perpetuating stereotypes related to disability, requires high level teaching skills. It also requires that teachers think specifically about their roles, and the influence they have on their students and peers within their classrooms and schools. Existing tensions between acknowledging diversity in all students and acknowledging disability and how teachers negotiate these tensions is unclear. However, as these tensions may affect how teachers view students with disabilities it is a topic area worthy of further investigation.

The broadening of thinking about diversity includes acknowledgment of individual learning styles, the promotion of a range of skills and abilities held by individuals, as well as a recognition that these differences interact to enrich the learning environments of school communities (Tangen & Bland, 2012). Forlin (2001) refers to a model of diversity that is based on equity and opportunity in education. 'A virtual school bag' has been a phrase to describe the many diverse characteristics children enter with them to school including cultural and linguistic diversity, disability, community knowledge, and socioeconomic history (Thomson, 2004). How teachers conceptualise the virtual school bag children bring with them to school impacts teachers' thinking about them as learners and their teaching approach. Teachers have long held concerns over their ability to cater for diversity among their students (Ring & Travers, 2005). However, given that there is an expectation that teachers can anticipate diversity amongst their students in their classes and that they must provide a teaching climate that reflects this (Foreman, 2008), there is potential for teachers to feel overwhelmed.

Central to the current notion of diversity are value judgments placed on diversity. Diversity has been described in the literature as an asset that contributes to the richness of school culture (Keeffe & Carrington, 2006). This valuing of difference has only really been possible through the growth of the newer models of understanding regarding disability. Diversity can only be valued when difference is seen as a strength, rather than a deficit (Parsons, 2007). This difference in understanding of diversity is critical for teachers as the way teachers view children with disabilities in turn affects the way they teach their students.

The shift away from the historical emphasis on deficit located within individual children (Terzi, 2005) to a larger focus on diversity is the result of several factors. It was identified in Petriwskyj's (2010) work on diversity in the context of transition to school, that a platform of children's rights, recognition that diversity is represented in all individuals, difficulties in identifying disabilities, complexity of teaching in modern times, and an increased need to reduce stigmatisation are key features of the broadening of the concept of diversity. However this broadening construct of diversity has not been without its critics. There has been tension over practical concerns with widening the frame of diversity to reflect difference in many areas. These criticisms are generally pragmatic in nature (Guralnick, 2001; Petriwskyj,

2010). Excessive classrooms demands, a lack of preparation and support of teachers, the demands on teachers, and the subsequent resourcing and supporting of teachers has been highlighted as significant concerns (Petriwskyj, 2010). These are very real concerns for teachers which impact their daily teaching life. The current research explores these pragmatic concerns with teachers to provide insight into how they conceptualise diversity in their teaching approach, and what has informed their thinking about inclusion and diversity. This information from teachers is vital in identifying how these concerns about diversity within classrooms are affecting teachers.

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Research presented has outlined what is known about the health issues associated with Down syndrome and how these issues may manifest in the educational environment. Literature has been presented regarding what is known about teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. What is particularly evident is the little literature evident in the area of teachers' experiences of teaching a child with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. This is an identified gap which this research tends to contribute towards. The following chapter, Chapter Three, outlines the methodological components of the study including data collection, data analysis and the methodological contribution of this research.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research was concerned with how teachers work with children with Down syndrome in their early years classrooms. Little literature existed that reported on the experiences of Australian teachers teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling, or how teachers conceptualised children with Down syndrome as learners. To understand the experiences of these teachers it was necessary to choose a research methodology that would effectively capture the complex contextual work of teachers, and their professional views. It was deemed appropriate to design a study that was qualitative in nature, as qualitative research is able to illuminate and garner insights about an issue and describe multiple perspectives and realities, rather than focusing on finding concrete answers (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

The layout of this chapter includes the research questions (Section 3.2), the research paradigm (Section 3.3), an explanation for a qualitative approach to the research (Section 3.4), and a case study design (Section 3.5). Participant recruitment (Section 3.6) and a description of the participants in the research are provided. This description is followed by the data collection techniques (Section 3.7), and data analysis techniques used (Section 3.8). An explanation of the research rigour (Section 3.9) is provided before the Chapter Summary (Section 3.10).

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Before elaborating on the research design used in this study the research questions are revisited below. The overarching research question for this study was:

What are teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling (Years Prep – three)?

Sub-questions for the research are:

1: What factors support and challenge teachers' teaching approach when teaching a child with Down syndrome in their classroom?

2: In what ways do teachers working with children with Down syndrome conceptualise them as learners?

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The knowledge and understanding of the research paradigm and the theoretical decisions made regarding the design of the study served to galvanise the project. In Chapter One these theoretical positions were outlined. These are revisited in Chapter Three to demonstrate how the theoretical framework impacted and underpinned the methodology.

In broad terms, a paradigm has been described as a set of basic premises (Creswell, 1998). These premises may include methodological, epistemological and ontological premises (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Other terms synonymous with paradigm include a 'system of thinking' (Neuman, 2004), a 'worldview', (Creswell, 2008) and an 'interpretive framework' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) refer to research paradigms as knowledge claims and define knowledge claims as the assumptions the researcher holds about the research.

The understanding of these premises and assumptions regarding the research were key elements which positioned the researcher within the research. The methodological, epistemological and ontological beliefs held by the researcher informed the theoretical framework in which the study was located. What follows is an exploration of the constructivist paradigm used in this study.

3.3.1 Constructivist Paradigm

The adoption of a constructivist research paradigm for this study concurred with the theoretical premises, assumptions and knowledge the researcher held; and the reasoning that its applicability for the research topic was the best fit. The research was informed by key assumptions including that multiple realities are constructed by different individuals, and it is the understanding of their experiences that contribute to further knowledge and understanding (Merriam, 1998). These assumptions were particularly relevant for the current study, which documented teachers' experiences in their own contexts. The acknowledgement that reality is constructed socially, culturally, and historically (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) created a framework in which the researcher could begin to understand and describe the multiple experiences and realities from the participants' perspectives in their contexts.

Case studies are often categorised by their use of 'real life' context (Simons, 2009). The phenomenon, in this case, was teachers teaching children with Down syndrome and this occurred in a 'real life' classroom context. This research assumed context as going beyond a simplistic notion of context as a place (Van Oers, 1998) and borrowed from a more phenomenographic approach. Marton and Booth (1997) describe context as any structure which has relevance for those who experience it. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of this study, context can be interpreted by the person involved, and the meaningfulness of a situation differs for different people dependent on their own interpretations (Van Oers, 1998). Further to this, how a person acts within contexts is dependent on the direct environment, and how the person experiences and interprets the situations within this environment (van der Veer, 1996). Thus, context in this study was regarded as dynamic, including the teachers' interactions, the physical environment, the relationships and the meaning ascribed by the participants.

A key element of the constructivist research paradigm is that it assumes a relativist ontology that acknowledges that multiple realities exist (Merriam, 1998). This assumption was a key element in determining that three participants would take part in the study instead of one, as three participants would yield multiple views of the experiences of teachers teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. At the same time, three participants was a manageable number to fit within the timeframe of the research. The selection of participants for the research is explained further in Section 3.6. A naturalistic set of methodological procedures was implemented so the data collection could occur in the participants' natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As such, the data collection took place within the participants' schools and classrooms.

An underpinning assumption of a constructivist paradigm is that reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Any attempt to understand these realities is context-specific and value-bound, rather than value-free (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). For this research this has meant validating the role of the researcher, and the influence the researcher has had on the research process. Lincoln and Guba (2000) have described this process as multi-voice reconstruction, or that of being a passionate participant in the research. This recognition and acknowledgment of the researcher's own impact on the research

process provided an opportunity for positioning the researcher within the research according to her own beliefs, values and culture, social and historical experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This has been done in Chapter One by acknowledging the researcher's own history as a factor in this research. The researcher has tried to not let biases interfere in the research process. Understanding in a constructivist paradigm is derived from the assumption that meaning is derived from the interplay between the participants' experiences and the researcher's interpretations of these experiences. Merriam (1998) explains, "Meaning is embedded in people's experiences and this meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions" (p. 6).

The title of the research was concerned with teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome. This accessing of teacher experiences heralded a deeper question of what access a researcher had to a teacher's experience. In essence, how can the researcher claim representation of the experiences of the teachers in this study? In response to this question, the choice of methodology and the subsequent data collection techniques in the research allowed access to teachers' experiences through their language in interviews, their actions through observation, and their interpretations through a mind mapping technique and document analysis session. The combination of teachers' language, their actions, and their interpretations constituted their experiences in this study.

The relevance of this for this research was two-fold. First, positioning myself in the research and acknowledging my contribution to the research was integral to the outcomes of this study. As the main instrument in the data collection, interpretation, and reporting of the cases it was critical to monitor the impact of the researcher on the research process (Simons, 2009). In this study, the researcher frequently explores and reflected on her role in the research process, including questioning how her own values and actions impacted on the research process (Simons, 2009). Second, this research aimed to build a deep understanding of the participants' experiences in their own contexts. Documentation of the settings, experiences, and what was relevant to the teachers assisted in contributing to a holistic picture of teachers' experiences (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the adoption of a constructivist paradigm was deemed the most appropriate to best address the research questions in this study.

3.3.2 The Usefulness of a Social Constructivist Lens

Social constructivism was specifically used to understand and interpret teachers' experiences in the current research (Vygotsky, 1978). In social constructivist research it is acknowledged that individuals' lives (in this case the teachers) are constructed on a foundation of many truths, explanations, values, and beliefs that have resulted from past histories and interactions with others (Adams, 2007; Patton, 2002). The meanings they construct from past histories and interactions with others then become reality for them (Crotty, 1998). Teachers do not work in isolation; their working life is a complex set of interactions within complex organisations and cultures. Therefore, attention was paid in the research not only to their constructions of knowledge but also how their knowledge had been influenced by wider socio-cultural perspectives (Patton, 2002) both from their past and current teaching situations.

Teachers will have varying interpretations and perspectives based on their own histories and social experiences. This variance in experience serves to illuminate contemporary realities of teachers teaching children with Down syndrome. A social constructivist viewing lens afforded an opportunity to acknowledge how people make sense of their world and are influenced by facets of their own culture, histories, and by time and by place. It is important for teachers to realise that their local and national education contexts influence their experiences.

The importance of a social constructivist orienting lens and the overarching constructivist paradigm was influential in all parts of the study including the data collection, analysis and writing up of the findings. Initially, very early on in this research, the researcher had come to think of reporting the 'stories' of teachers as they told them. However, it became clear through the theoretical framework used in this research that it was impossible to isolate teachers 'stories' from their complex social and political contexts. In order to understand the experiences of the teachers in this research it was also necessary to understand the contextual factors in which they worked, which in turn affected their experiences.

3.4 USING A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The social constructivist lens used in this research was a qualitative research approach, providing rich accounts of the experiences and perceptions of teachers

teaching children with Down syndrome in the years of schooling from Prep to Year Three. A qualitative research design was chosen as the most appropriate way to engage with the research questions in this study. The providence of qualitative research is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual beliefs and action intersect with culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Qualitative research has been described by Merriam (1998) as an "umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) point out that qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right and describe it as "a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions" (p. 3). Qualitative research locates the observer in the world, and it consists of interpretative, material practices that not only make the world visible but seek to transform the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Burns (2000) adds that the aim of qualitative research is to "capture and understand individual definitions, descriptions and meanings of events" (p. 388). The use of a qualitative approach has been described as a way to explore the lived experiences of people in real settings and understand how they make sense of everyday life (Hatch, 2002). The relevance of these definitions for this research and the adoption of a qualitative approach were rooted firmly in making the world and experiences of the participants visible, and capturing the meanings they derived from living these experiences.

The usefulness of a qualitative approach for the current research was that it allowed the researcher to build up knowledge of a particular topic. Edwards (2010) asserts that qualitative research in education "allows us to build up a picture of the actions and interpretations of children and adults, and locate them in the shifting networks of complex interactions that make up the contexts" (p. 155). The ability to generate rich descriptions of meaning from participants assisted the researcher in understanding phenomenon through these rich descriptions (Berg, 2004). The relevance of this statement can be related back to the original research purpose, which was to build up a picture of the interactions, experiences, and perceptions of teachers teaching children with Down syndrome in the contexts of their schools. Within a qualitative research design the complexity of the settings and the contextual factors are considered unique (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The unique picture built

for the current research focused on teachers' experiences of working with children in the early years of schooling who have Down syndrome. This picture was constructed using a case study design, as described below.

3.5 CASE STUDY DESIGN

The use of case study in qualitative research design is common. Merriam (1998) highlights case study as a commonly used strategy in educational research and qualitative research design, while Stake (1995) notes its prevalence in qualitative research design. Patton (2002) has indicated that the use of qualitative inquiry methods provide researchers with an "empirical basis for describing the perspectives of others" (p. 53).

Qualitative data tells a story about the participants' experiences and what it is like to step inside their individual contexts, which in turn illuminates their experiences for others. Working within a constructivist paradigm the use of a case study approach is congruent with the aim of the current research. Merriam (1998) describes a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. xiii). Berg (2004) defines case study as a "method involving systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions" (p. 283). In both of these definitions emphasis is placed on an area of investigation. Merriam (1998) relates to the notion of a 'bounded' phenomenon. Stake (1995) defines this boundedness as a "functioning specific or bounded system" (p. 119-120). The boundaries of the case study are deemed to be a decisive factor in defining a case study. This focus on particularity and uniqueness is critical in undertaking case study research (Simons, 2009). Case studies are differentiated from other qualitative research designs because of this intensive and focussed approach to a particular defined area or bounded system (Merriam, 1998).

In this research each teacher was seen as one individual case. Thus the research encompassed three separate cases. While there are three teachers in this case study, the particularity and complexity of the single case (or teacher in the case) was paramount (Stake, 1995). The underlying assumption is that by looking at each case from varied angles, a better understanding of the case study was gained. Well

constructed case studies show awareness of holistic and context sensitive information (Patton, 2002). It is for this reason that, with every case presented in the results chapter (Chapter Four), contextual information was given to fully represent the experiences of each of the participants as lived within their unique teaching contexts.

In the field of qualitative research design there are many types of case study. Stake (1995) observed three different types of case study, including the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study and the collective case study. An intrinsic case study is defined by the case which, as the focus of the investigation, is the single most important factor (Stake, 1995). The instrumental case study is particularly concerned with the refinement of theory or bringing clarity on an issue (Stake, 1995). The third type of case study is named the collective case study as it relates to a number of cases which are intended to illuminate a clearer perception about a larger number of cases (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) identifies studies using more than one case as collective, cross-case, multi-case, multisite or comparative case studies.

This research used the collective case study model as three teachers (three cases) were being presented. The use of three cases in this study was purposeful for two reasons. The first reason was an adequate number of cases needed to be selected to provide an in depth view of teaching students with Down syndrome, but with a consideration of how much data could be feasibly analysed to garner quality results from the research. Feasibility, therefore, was central to the selection of three cases. The second reason for selecting multiple cases related to issues of validity. Miles and Huberman (1994) have discussed the use of a range of cases instead of a single case as an opportunity to "strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (p. 29). Merriam (1998) also notes that the use of multiple cases is a common strategy for enhancing the external validity of a research project. Therefore, three cases were used in the case study so that data could be compared and contrasted between and across the cases to obtain a clearer understanding of teachers' experiences in the early years of schooling.

This section has noted the varying types of case study used and explained the use of a collective case study design for this research. Although a case study approach has been adopted in this study, it must be noted that the case study method of research has both strengths and limitations.

3.5.1 Strengths and Limitations of the Case Study Approach

Is it important to note that all research designs have certain strengths and limitations, including case study research. The function of research has been described as not to map and conquer the world but to understand it better through thick description, experiential understanding and multiple realities (Stake, 1995). A researcher must consider all options and determine a way to provide the most comprehensive answer to the identified research problem. Decisions made by researchers reflect an interactive process which is moulded by the researcher's own personal histories, gender, social class, race and ethnicity as well as the participants' histories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). What is important is that there is congruence between the selection of a case study design and its inextricable links to answering the research problem (Merriam, 1998).

A strength of case study design is that it offers a means of investigating issues that are anchored within the context they occur. Lincoln and Guba (2000) identify case study reporting as having the ability to provide holistic description needed to understand the context of a situation. The strength of this is important for the reader to build understanding through the experiences of others via immersion in the context of the situation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). A case study design offers a way to investigate complex social units that consist of multiple variables (Merriam, 1998). The relevance of this for the current research was in the binding of the information and understandings of the teachers in this study from their own experience and context specific situations.

Another strength in using a case study design lies in the area of flexibility. George and Bennett (2005) explain this as “when a case study researcher asks a participant “were you thinking X when you did Y,” and gets the answer, “No, I was thinking Z”, then if the researcher had not thought of Z as a causally relevant variable, they may have a new variable demanding to be heard (p. 20). This flexibility was the result of time spent in the field, through the various data collection methods and by allowing themes to develop. Flyvbjerg (2006) notes that predictive theories and universals, such as are found in quantitative research design, cannot offer the context dependent information that a qualitative case study design can in the area of human affairs. Case studies provide concrete data that resonates with the

readers' own experience, thereby making the results more vivid and concrete than abstract (Merriam, 1998).

Case studies have been used successfully in educational research, particularly in inclusive education contexts. Examples of research using a case study approach in inclusive education include being used to illuminate areas of teachers' work, innovations in practice, inclusion or exclusion of students, issues of effective leadership and in other related areas (Ghesquiere, Maes, & Vandenberghe, 2004; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010; Purcell, Horn, & Palmer, 2007; Tarr, Tsokova, & Takkunen, 2011).

The strength of case studies also feeds into a limitation of case study design. Qualitative case studies are limited to the lens of the researcher, who is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1988). As a result bias may occur. This possibility was identified as a potential limitation of this research and was acknowledged by the researcher. To minimise this bias steps were taken in Chapter One to acknowledge the researcher's own role and background, combined with building in measures to ensure rigour and reflexivity in the research (Section 3.9). This section has provided background information on the research paradigm, the use of a qualitative approach, and case study. The following section focuses specifically on the participant recruitment in this research, the data collection methods and the analysis of data.

3.6 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Participants in this study were teachers working with a child with Down syndrome in their general education classroom. A requirement was that the teacher was teaching a year level from Prep to Year Three, as this was where the focus of this study lay. Consent for the study to occur was obtained from the teachers, from the principal of the school, and from the parents of the child with Down syndrome. Patton (2002) argues that qualitative research focuses on relatively small samples to provide deep inquiry of the subject. A sample size of three was deemed adequate to provide multiple views, but also to remain manageable in terms of data collection and data analysis given the researcher's approach and timelines of the research.

The identification of teachers working with a child with Down syndrome in an early years classroom proved difficult. As a result, the researcher approached the

Education Consultant from The Down Syndrome Association of Queensland for assistance. This correspondence was via e-mail contact and the e-mail letter can be viewed in Appendix A. The Education Consultant was asked to provide a list of schools where children with Down syndrome were attending. Ethical clearance was shown to the Education Consultant to inform them of the study's ethical clearance regarding their assistance (Appendix A). The researcher requested a list of all the Queensland schools available to ensure a wide base of participants was identified. From there, a list of schools was identified and e-mailed to the researcher.

The researcher then used this list of school contacts to invite teachers to participate. This proved extremely difficult. Telephone calls were initially made to schools, asking to speak with the principal of the school and explaining the nature of the telephone call. Invariably, the administration staff would ask that the request be put in an e-mail to the principal. E-mails were sent to principals along with ethical clearance information and participation information, which can be seen in Appendix B. In total ten e-mails were sent to principals in ten schools.

After two weeks, the researcher had not received any replies from principals. A second phone call was made to the ten schools asking to speak with the principal. This yielded three conversations with principals. One principal agreed to pass the information for the research project onto the teacher who was working in the Prep Year and had a child with Down syndrome in their class, and expressed interest in the study. One principal declined to participate and one principal passed the enquiry onto their learning support teacher. The learning support teacher from this school asked if she would be able to be the participant instead of the classroom teacher citing the classroom teacher being overwhelmed in her role and not wanting to burden her further with another project. The researcher declined as the parameters of the study involved the research being carried out with the class teacher.

After a further week another phone call was made to the first principal who expressed interest in the study. He relayed that the teacher at his school was interested and gave the researcher direct e-mail contact for the teacher to correspond with. E-mail communication in the form of the participant information letter was sent to the teacher (Appendix H). After some time the teacher expressed willingness to participate in the study and a first meeting time was arranged to go through the

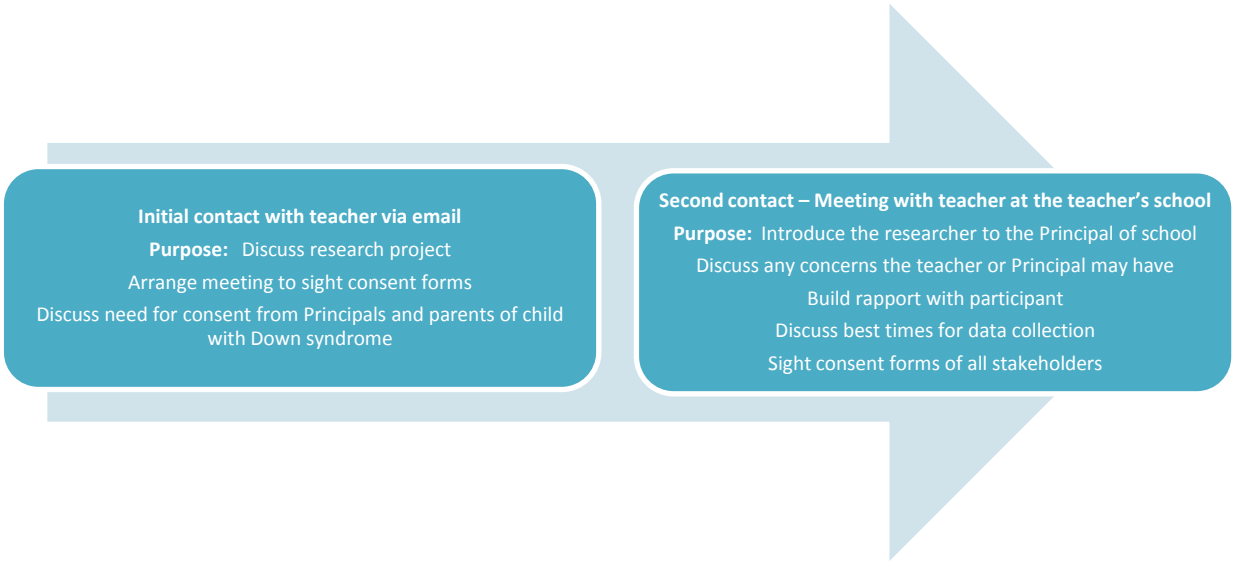
consent forms and information regarding the study. This teacher became the first participant in the study.

A further follow-up e-mail was sent to principals this time state-wide with a follow up phone call. Contact was made with a principal who expressed interest in the project, and sent the teacher's details to the researcher. Correspondence was sent out to the teacher who responded she would like to be part of the study. This was the second participant.

Obtaining the third participant for the study proved challenging. A prospective site became available as the result of discussions within the researcher's wider network of research colleagues. This colleague knew a school where there was a child with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. Information was e-mailed to the teacher to gauge interest in participating in the study. The teacher responded by e-mail expressing interest in the project. The researcher informed the teacher that permission needed to be sought from her principal and also the parents of the child with Down syndrome in her class. A second e-mail was received from the teacher asking if the special education teacher could be present at the data collection as well. The researcher reinforced that the classroom teacher was the focus of the research however agreed to the two teachers being present for the data collection. After the sites were identified the process of informing the teachers about the study began.

It is acknowledged that when teachers are asked to be very open about their practice there may be feelings of uncertainty. To address this a visit was made to the school setting to build rapport with the teacher. This visit was arranged for a time convenient to the teacher and took place in their classroom to allow them to feel more at ease in their own setting. At this visit the process of data collection was discussed, including the interviews and the reasons for them. Assurances of confidentially were also discussed. Below in Figure 3.1 are the steps taken before the data collection began.

Figure 3.1. Initial Contact with Teachers Prior to Data Collection



At the second contact with the participants it was noted when the most convenient times for data collection would be for the teachers. Dates were set at this second contact for the first interview.

3.6.1 The Participants

The participants in this research were all female teachers teaching in year levels from Prep to Year Three. It was not planned that all teachers would be female; this was the result of the outcomes of the teachers and principals agreeing to participate in the study. All three teachers were teaching a child with Down syndrome in their class in the year of the data collection. All three classes were classified as general education classes at schools which were not special schools.

For the purpose of the research, participant one is named Melanie; her student is named Liam. Participant two is named Angela; her student is named Michael. Participant three is named Lisa and her student is named John. Melanie and Lisa worked in schools which came under the auspices of Education Queensland. Angela worked with in Brisbane Catholic Education. All three teachers had varying levels of teaching experience. None of the three participants had previously taught a child with Down syndrome in their teaching career. Table 3.1 provides the demographics of

participants for the research. All the names of children and teachers have been changed to protect their identities.

Table 3.1

Demographics of Participants in the Research

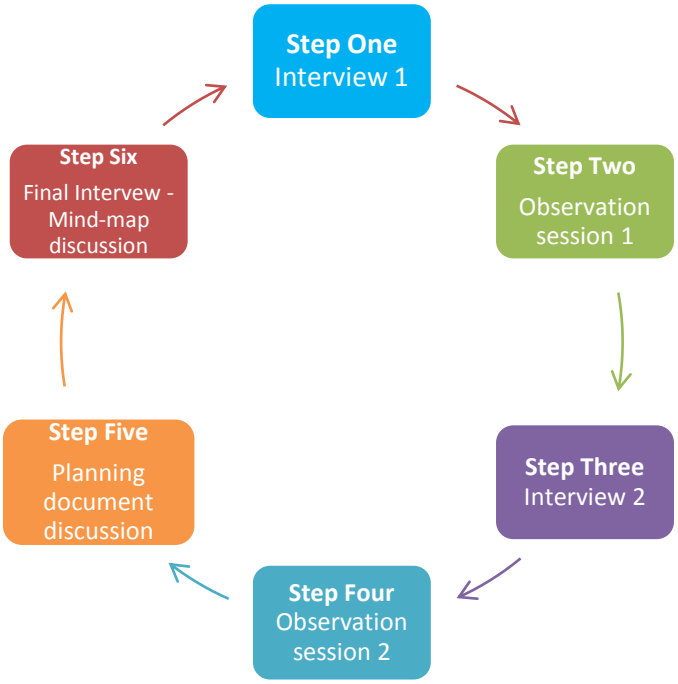
Teacher's Name	Grade Teaching	Years Teaching	School Sector	Child's Name	Child's Age
Melanie	Prep	30 Years	Education Queensland	Liam	6 Years
Angela	Year Three	8 Years	Brisbane Catholic Education	Michael	9 Years
Lisa	Prep-Year One	22 Years	Education Queensland	John	7 Years

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection in qualitative case studies constitutes a specific way of collecting, organising, and analysing data. The purpose was to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest. The underlying assumption in a case study is that, by looking at the subject from many and varied angles, we can get closer to the why and the how of things in relation to the research question. Within this approach, there is the assumption that there must be the collection of good evidence, and lots of it (Thomas, 2011). The use of interviews, observation and document analysis were chosen as data collection methods in the current research to provide understanding of how teachers in the early phase of schooling teach children with Down syndrome in their classrooms.

Data collection began in August 2012 and was completed in December 2012. During this time two semi-structured interviews (step one and three in Figure 3.2 below) were conducted with each participant. Two observation sessions (step two and step four in Figure 3.2) were carried out in the classrooms and schools of the participants, along with one session with the teacher discussing their planning documents (step five in Figure 3.2). One further follow up meeting was held with the participants that consisted of final interview and mind mapping session (step six in Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Data Collection Steps



3.7.1 Interviews

A series of two semi-structured audio-recorded interviews was conducted at two time points. The length of time between the two interviews was approximately two months. A final interview and mind mapping discussion was held at the end of the data collection to ensure that the representations the researcher had made of the teachers' views accurately reflected their views. In the cases of schools one and two, the interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. With case study three, the classroom teacher and the special education teacher were present at each session.

The first and second interview used the standardised open-ended interview technique (Patton, 2002). This technique involved a list of questions devised for each of the participants before the interview session. The questions were designed in an open-ended manner so the participants could best describe their experiences to the researcher (Creswell, 2008). The interview questions were typed out as they were to be asked in the interview. Interview probes (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2002) were written into the questions to provide further clarification and elaboration by the participants. The use of interview probes provided an avenue for deepening the

responses given by the participants. For the use of interview probes to be successful it was necessary to be mindful of what was relevant to the research questions of the study and how the information could be used to influence these.

All participants were asked the same questions. The initial questions were related to factual outcomes, such as how long they have been teaching and if they had taught a child with Down syndrome before. The questions then progressed to asking about their experiences of teaching a child with Down syndrome. The researcher provided a copy of the interview questions to the teachers at the beginning of each interview (Appendix K). The interview questions were designed to capture information pertinent to the research questions outlined in this research, including information on the teachers' experiences teaching children with Down syndrome, along with the factors which supported and challenged their teaching approaches.

At the beginning of the interview the researcher discussed the process of the interview, that it was audio recorded and that the information would be confidential. At the completion of each interview there was an opportunity for the participant to offer further information. Both the first and second interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The semi-structured interviews ranged from forty minutes to one hour and a half in total. The length of the interviews varied as the interview length was determined by the participants' responses. The interviews predominantly were carried out in the classrooms of the teachers outside teaching hours, although the interviews with participant one were conducted in the library outside school hours. Handwritten notes by the researcher were made during the interviews for the purpose of further probing throughout the interview and as a reference for later analysis. The participants were reminded that their names, the students' names and identifying remarks about schools would be removed as per the ethical requirements of the research project. The audio recorded transcripts were later transcribed by the researcher verbatim. In addition to this the notes taken by the researcher were rewritten to accompany the transcripts.

3.7.2 The Final Interview using Mind Maps

The final interview was conducted to gauge the participants' perspectives on the data collected and the interpretation of that data to date by the researcher. The creation of mind maps was designed by the researcher, based on the work of Simons

(2009) and the concept of 'respondent validation'. The central role of the mind maps to was to ensure reflexivity in the research process. Mind maps were created after the first two interviews, the observation session, and the planning discussion were completed. A sample of these maps can be seen in Appendix C. These mind maps consisted of five separate mind maps which included 1) the participants' views on themselves as teachers and their teaching approach, 2) inclusive education, 3) classroom context, 4) whole school context, 5) and information regarding the child with Down syndrome in their class. These mind maps first acted as a way of distilling the data collected into one place, and second provided the participants a mechanism for reflection and clarification on the data presented. The mind maps were created on a case-by-case basis.

This research was based on teachers' self reporting their own experiences. As such data collection techniques needed to be used which reflected as closely as possible the teachers' experiences. It was clear that to increase reflexivity in this research a technique needed to be developed which catered to this need. The interviews, observation sessions and field notes, while all contributing greatly to the data collection, could not identify how closely the interpretations of the researcher were aligned to the experiences of the participants.

Mind mapping is a technique originally designed to increase memory retention and productivity (Buzan, 1976). Mind maps have four central characteristics including 1) a central image, word or phrase, 2) main themes related to the central image, 3) significant words or images coming from the central image and finally, 4) a connected nodal structure emanating from the central word or image (Buzan & Buzan, 1993). However, the implementation of a mind mapping technique is flexible, with limited identified rules (Buzan & Abbott, 2005). The lack of rules assists in creating fluid documents, without the framework of a strictly linear organisation (Crowe & Sheppard, 2012).

The inclusion of a mind mapping interview in this research as a data collection technique was in response to building reflexivity in the study. This reflexivity was sought through the representation and interpretations of implicit knowledge the teachers had about their teaching experiences. The flexible nature of the mind mapping technique captured the teachers' thinking and interpretations, adding another layer of depth to the data collection. The use of hand written maps was

chosen to enhance the flexibility of the document and ensured the teachers found the documents accessible.

In this interview the researcher presented the mind maps to the teacher and discussed that these were the central ideas taken from the data collected to date and asked for their feedback. The researcher went through each of the five mind maps point by point with the teachers. The teachers were advised that they could clarify, elaborate, disagree or discuss any of the information presented. These interviews generally took around an hour. In all three cases the teachers offered feedback, further interpretations and insights into the data presented. Changes were made to the mind maps in collaboration with the teachers to ensure that the data collected truly represented what each teacher wanted to convey about their experiences. The teacher in case study one commented on this process as being one of the most effective sessions which had informed her professional career to date. She felt the ability to reflect on her own teaching was something she rarely had time for, and she felt the opportunity to do this was a unique opportunity. The mind maps were also used by the researcher in the analysis phase of the research.

The creation of the mind maps facilitated an opportunity to demonstrate reflexivity in the research process. The use of the mind maps in an active process with the participants allowed for an intentional representation of the experiences of the teachers as close as possible to the reality of what the researcher had listened to and observed throughout the data collection period (Simons, 2009). As a significant instrument of the data collection and analysis this reflexivity of the mind mapping approach demonstrated a critical factor in ensuring validity in the study by the researcher (Simons, 2009).

An important facet of this technique was to present the data in an accessible manner for the participants. Deliberate decisions were made by the researcher to chart the data collected onto simple mind maps which the teachers could easily read and which facilitated a joint approach to the mind mapping. It was an important element that the teachers could feel they could write something on the maps or cross out interpretations made by the researcher if they felt it did not represent their experiences. This kind of technique is referred to in literature as a ‘democratic model of evaluation’ (Simons, 2009). This means simply that the researcher engaged with the participants in a process to ensure the documentation of their experiences was as

close as possible to their representation. Another labelling of similar techniques includes ‘respondent validation’ and refers to the checking of accuracy of the representations and interpretations of the participants (Simons, 2009).

3.7.3 Observation Sessions

The addition of observation as a data collection technique was chosen to provide additional opportunities for understanding the three cases. Two observation sessions were carried out which consisted of a half day observation session, of approximately 4 hours each. The observations sessions provided the researcher with a way to record data of interest directly, instead of relying on the completion of a survey or questionnaire about the teachers' daily practices (Rolfe & Emmett, 2010). The observation sessions occurred within each of the classrooms, but also extended to school activities which were occurring at times when the researcher was on site. The extra school activities included school assemblies, break times, preparations for musicals, library visits and other activities.

The researcher assumed the role of a non-participatory observer (Wolcott, 1988) who does not participate within the activities of the class. The aim was to not disrupt the normal course of the day; however, it was noted that by having an extra person in the room this was a disruption in itself. The researcher had already developed a rapport with the participants through the initial meeting and interview before observing within the context. These initial meetings were set up to decrease any potential feelings of anxiety that may have been felt by the teacher having a researcher in their own classrooms watching them. The observations and field notes were then written up into full research notes for later analysis. The researcher maintained a diary of notes with informal notations and observations recorded throughout the data collection period.

The use of the observation sessions provided contextual information collected within the natural setting of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The implementation of the observation protocol allowed the observation sessions to be both targeted and relevant to the research problem outlined in this study. However there were several limitations to the use of observations which needed to be addressed by the researcher. Limitations included how the presence of the researcher may affect the participants and the possibility for bias as the researcher designed the

observational protocol and then carried it out (Patton, 2002). The collection of data via observations was also limited in that it relied on what was seen of the external behaviours of participants and by what was actually observed on the day of the observation sessions (Patton, 2002). These limitations have been addressed in part by using several different data sources to collect the data. The data collection within the observation sessions was used in conjunction with the interview data and the data gathered through the document analysis. The observation sessions began after the first interview was conducted to add depth to the interview data (Patton, 2002).

The use of an observation protocol was deemed to be beneficial for this study. An observation protocol was designed in conjunction with the researcher's supervisors. The observation protocol used in this study can be found in Appendix D. The use of an observational protocol in qualitative research design facilitates researchers documenting what is seen at the research site (Creswell, 2008). It also acted as a way of organising field notes taken during observation sessions. The observation protocol design offered large amounts of space for field notes to be taken as well.

Using an observation protocol in this study was important to provide cohesion between how what was going to be observed could result in answering the research questions. For this to occur, the researcher needed to go back to the research problem and research questions and pull out particular themes for observation. Rolfe and Emmett (2010) noted the importance of creating congruence between the choice of observational technique and the research questions. These themes were then matched with themes from the literature reviewed for this study. This yielded several themes which formed the basis for the observation protocol.

The observation themes that were included in the protocol were: a focus on teaching approaches, communication of the child with Down syndrome (including receptive and expressive communication), the use of technology, the classroom context, the use of resources and the learning environment. Space was also located on the observation protocol to draw a map of the learning environment providing further contextual information. A section for follow up themes was identified on the observation protocol to detail other themes which may become evident throughout the observation session. Categories marked *other* were made available in all sections for the creation of new themes noted within the observation sessions.

3.7.4 Planning Discussion/ Document Analysis

A discussion time to look throughout the participants' planning documents was made. The researcher and participants discussed the teacher's planning documents including the participant talking about their planning strategies. Handwritten notes were used by the researcher to document information for later reflection and interpretation of the planning documents.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) identified that the incorporation of local documents provides background and context to a study, even though this may not constitute a large part of the data collection. School policy documents and handbooks were used in this research as were the teachers' planning documents. Individual education plans were not used in this research as the focus was on the teacher's planning, not on the students' progress as such.

One planning and document discussion was carried out with each teacher. The length of these discussions ranged from approximately 25 minutes to 45 minutes. Teachers shared their planning documents with the researcher and talked about the process they go through in planning for the students in their class. The focus was on how the teacher planned for the student with Down syndrome.

The aims of the current research were to document experiences of teachers working with children with Down syndrome in their early years classrooms. Within the research approach the researcher was used as the primary data collection instrument. This meant having sustained contact with the participants in various ways including through semi-structured interviews, observation sessions, planning discussions and a follow up discussion to ensure the researcher had portrayed their experiences in line with the participants' views and experiences. The following section outlines the process of data analysis utilised in this research.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

It is widely recognised that qualitative research methods can produce voluminous amounts of data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). One way to ensure the researcher managed the data in the current research included keeping the participant base to three. A thematic analysis of the data collected was conducted to discover patterns and emerging themes (Patton, 2002). Within the adoption of a qualitative case study it was imperative to note that the

process of data collection and data analysis do not exist in isolation. There was no identifiable time that analysis occurred; rather analysis was giving meaning to first impressions as well as final compilations (Stake, 1995). The process of data collection, analysis and documenting findings was interactive, interdependent and iterative by nature (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998).

To ensure first-hand knowledge of the data the researcher transcribed all the interviews verbatim herself, rather than outsourcing this. This was a deliberate decision as the researcher was then able to become fully immersed in the details of the interviews through the process of transcription and initiating the process of identifying themes emerging from the data (Patton, 2002). Throughout the process of transcription a further column was created on the transcription table which allowed for thoughts to be recorded related to what the participants were saying as transcription took place. These then provided points of analysis to come back to later.

Within a collective case study there are two elements of analysis. First there is a within-case analysis and then a cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). The within-case analysis occurred in the following manner. Following the transcription phase the data for each case was brought together to form a complete picture of each case. This was done to create a holistic view of the data first before the process of coding the data into themes (Creswell, 2008). It also allowed the big ideas or themes to begin to materialise and be used in the coding process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The data to analyse when bought together included interview transcripts, notes from the interviews, observation protocol sheets and notes taken in the field, the mind maps and the notes taken during the planning discussions. Throughout the process of the data collection the researcher had also instigated a process of writing reflection sheets. These reflection sheets were similar to diary entries, where the researcher jotted down thoughts and reflections on the data collection process. These reflection sheets enabled the researcher to critically think about her own potential biases, thoughts and feelings regarding the data collection process. These reflection sheets were included with the raw data.

To understand a holistic sense of the case, it was necessary to read and re-read the data several times (Hatch, 2002). Throughout this process further notes were taken to inform the process of analysis. This immersion in the data was done without identification of coding structures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout this process

of re-reading and note taking segments of text were highlighted (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This process was inductive analysis where themes began to emerge through the data (Patton, 2002). A data summary table was utilised which included passages of text and notes placed in one summary sheet for each case.

Themes were then identified through each of the data summary tables. These themes were assigned and passages of text or notes which fitted into the themes were highlighted. These themes were then coded and filed under the corresponding code (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). From here the themes were pooled to find corresponding categories, and the similar codes were aggregated to identify the main themes (Creswell, 2012).

The themes were further refined until three overarching themes were identified. These three themes included 1) teaching approach, 2) perspectives of diversity and 3) collaboration. Quotes from the transcription data, field notes and observation notes from the data were then filed under these three themes. This process of analysis was done individually for each case. Understanding of each individual case was a priority so the analysis began with case one, and then moved on to cases two and three.

After this phase of the analysis had occurred for each case a visual display was then developed which provided an overarching view of the three cases, the themes and how this data related to the research questions of the study. This process was followed by a cross-analysis of the three cases. This cross-analysis resulted in further identification of themes across the cases, which were then organised as cross-case themes. These themes were then used to frame the discussion in Chapter Five. These themes include 1) the way teachers view children with Down syndrome, 2) early childhood teaching, 3) Down syndrome and information for teachers, 4) support for teachers, 5) inclusive education, and 6) professional development.

3.9 RESEARCH RIGOUR

The research approach chosen acknowledged the role the researcher played within the research program. This role has been described as an ‘active role’ that enabled the researcher to develop themes which she felt were important to the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative research assumes different measures than quantitative measures in addressing issues of validity and reliability. The concept of trustworthiness had been established in qualitative research to address

issues of validity. Trustworthiness consists of four components including 1) credibility, 2) dependability, 3) confirmability, and 4) transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this research a fifth category of applicability has been added.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the way the researcher represents the views of the participants and is critical to the aim of the current research. The notion of credibility denotes whether the findings are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, and the reader (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Three elements to credibility have been identified as: the methods used in field work and the analysis of the data; the commitment to the philosophical ideals of qualitative inquiry; and the credibility of the researcher and their openness and experience (Patton, 2002). To counter claims of non-credibility, the researcher from the outset in Chapter One disclosed her history and experience within the subject of research. Throughout the research program there had been a clear acknowledgment of how the researcher's views may influence participants and a conscious awareness of this.

To counter claims of bias the methods used within this study were aligned with the research methods, the research questions and the theoretical underpinnings of the qualitative research approach adopted. Data from multiple sources was also sought including interviews, document analysis and observation which enabled a triangulation of data which in turn represents methodological validity (Patton, 2002). Multiple data sources allowed a variety of interpretations to evolve inductively throughout the research program. These data sources were reflected on with the researcher’s supervisors as a way of ensuring the reality of the participants was accurately reflected in the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

To minimise bias and promote reflexivity within the research program the researcher used a research diary which enabled critical reflection throughout the research process. In this study, the researcher was the primary instrument in the data collection, the analysis and the writing up of results. This diary provided a mechanism for critically reflecting on the various stages of the research process, and to minimise personal biases impacting the research rigour. The use of a mind mapping technique further contributed to the representation of the participants’ experiences.

3.9.2 Dependability

Dependability is concerned with reliability in the traditional sense; however unlike in quantitative research, reliability is not assessed statistically. Dependability in qualitative research refers to the ability of the researcher to track the process and procedures used to collect and interpret the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). It requires that the research approach is well thought out, and that the procedures of the inquiries are well conceived and documented. Measures including a research diary and the use of the researcher's supervisors' feedback have contributed to the dependability of this research study.

Issues of reflexivity in the process of qualitative research are critical. The researcher assumed an active role in thinking reflexively about the research process and outcomes (Simons, 2009). This active role in reflexivity included maintaining a research diary to critically reflect on the research process, which facilitated a process of counteracting the actions and decisions taken throughout the research process. Maintaining a dialogue regarding bias with the researcher's supervisors also served to add impetus for further critical reflection.

3.9.3 Confirmability

Confirmability relates to whether the findings of the research are the result of the research program, and not pre-conceived biases. Audit trails including records and other research strategies are considered integral to confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Constant back and forth interactions with supervisors ensured there was input into the confirmability of the research. The use of mind mapping discussions with the participants also contributed to a realistic portrayal of their experience by offering the chance to check the researcher's interpretation of the data collection.

3.9.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the way the study can communicate an understanding in depth of a research site and whether that can transfer to another context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The researcher needed to be concerned about whether there was enough information provided that could be compared with similar cases so that findings may be transferrable. There was a focus in the current research on providing a detailed description of the participant's contextual information which assisted in providing transferability of the research. This detailed description is

referred to as thick description (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), and the provision of thick description offered an element of shared experience to readers of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

In collective case studies cross-case generalisation is commonly adopted (Simons, 2009). This cross-case generalisation occurs through cross-case analysis that identifies commonalities between the cases. Meaning is grounded within the particular cases (Simons, 2009). However, the process of naturalistic generalisation (Stake, 1995) occurs when similarities and differences to cases or situations are found familiar by readers. Stake (1995) explains this process of naturalistic generalisation develops within a person as a result of their own experiences, when tacit knowledge of how things are, how they feel, and the familiarity with which others feel about them, is recalled through reading about others' experiences. Naturalistic generalisation is reliant on details, and rich description given by the researcher to enable readers to generalise then to their own contexts and experiences (Stake, 1995).

3.9.5 Applicability

Applicability is not in the original categories defined by Lincoln and Guba (2000) in response to issues of validity. It was added here by the researcher as it was relevant to address issues of applicability in this research. There was diversity within the participants in this study and applicability may represent a chance for other teachers to identify similarities with some of the characteristics of the participants' experiences. This diversity could result in the capacity for other teachers and staff working within schools to recognise valuable insights into how teachers work with children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. Applicability may also result in teachers working with any student with a disability identifying with the participants' experience in this study. Wide scale generalisation was not the aim of this study, however applicability for other teachers working with children with Down syndrome should not be discounted.

3.9.6 Ethical considerations

Ethics approval was sought for this study from Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee, and an Ethics Approval Certificate was granted (Appendix E). Approval was also sought and granted through Brisbane

Catholic Education (Appendix F), and Education Queensland (Appendix G). The research project was deemed to be a low risk project.

All participants were informed of the purpose and aim of the research in the initial contact with participants. This included meeting with the principals of the schools where the teachers worked to advise them of the purpose of the research. Participants were given an information sheet (Appendix H) first and if they were interested were provided with a consent form (Appendix I). Information sheets were also provided for the principals (Appendix B) and parents of the child with Down syndrome (Appendix J). Consent was sought from the principals and from the parents prior to any data collection. Consent in itself was not enough; research participants should all be aware of the aim of the research, and be fully cognisant of the details involved in the research (Neuman, 2004).

All participants were advised they could withdraw from the project at any time without reason or explanation. Confidentiality was discussed at length with the participants and an undertaking from the researcher was given to de-identify any information relating to the teacher, principal, school, or child in the final study. Pseudonyms are used in the final report to protect the privacy of the participants. Data and other material were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room that only the researcher could access.

A final discussion time was created in the data collection where the researcher could present the participants with mind maps of how the researcher had captured their perspectives throughout the data collection. This discussion was included in the data collection as a measure to ensure the representation of the participants was considered sufficiently accurate by the participants.

Ethical considerations are based on constructs of Western democratic principles. These underlying principles for research have serious implications (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and as such were treated by the researcher as deeply critical to the research process. A participant's right to withdraw at any stage of the process was communicated to the participants and this was vital right to ensure there was no coercion from the researcher (Neuman, 2004).

The confidential nature of the data collected and the identity of the participants was considered a key component in this research study. There has been observed in

literature that the process of anonymization and assuming confidentiality need to be further de-coupled and considered separately (Simons, 2009). The argument here is that assuming confidentiality must encompass the whole research process and is not simply a matter of not using the participants' real names. In this research, assuming confidentiality and the use of anonymization were equally important. To enable the participants to speak openly, an assurance was given that their views would be recorded anonymously. This process of anonymization enabled trust to be developed between the researcher and participant, and allowed the participant to feel confident that they could speak openly. The use of anonymization has further implications for teachers who may have felt they needed to speak in 'politically correct' terms if their views were going to be ascribed to their identity. Not enacting anonymization could have resulted in restrictions in the relaying of their experiences. Thus it was deemed crucial to provide confidentiality and also to anonymize the documenting of the teachers' experiences.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the research methods used. It framed the research within the constructivist paradigm and outlined the research questions for the study. The reasons for a qualitative approach being chosen have been outlined, along with justification for implementing a case study design. The recruitment of participants was discussed along with data collection methods. Data analysis in this research was discussed combined with an outlining of research rigour and issues of trustworthiness. The chapter concluded with identification of the ethical considerations in this research. The following chapter presents the data in the form of three separate case studies.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents results from case studies one, two and three. The intention of this chapter is two-fold. The beginning section of each case study contextualises the case with an overall description of the school, the classroom, the child and the teacher. Second, three overarching themes revealed in the data are presented for each case and include the classroom teacher's teaching approach, and perspectives of diversity and collaboration. Each case is presented separately, beginning with case study one.

4.2 CASE STUDY ONE

4.2.1 Description of School One

School one is situated in a rural setting outside metropolitan Brisbane. The school grounds are set within a scenic backdrop in what is a small rural community. Growth is evident throughout the school with freshly laid concrete, new classrooms under construction, and orange temporary fencing juxtaposed with older historic buildings.

At the time of data collection the school had around 285 students from Prep to Year Seven, and was growing at a rapid rate. There are twelve classes and due to the large increase in enrolments in recent years the school now operates an enrolment management plan. The school comes under the auspices of Education Queensland and an enrolment management plan is a mechanism designed to guarantee placement to students at their nearest school.

The original school opened in the 1800s with the original school building remaining onsite. Reflected in the school information booklet is a strong commitment to high academic expectations, a strong, safe, supportive environment and good communication with the community. There is a strong focus at this school on citizenship and the importance of community. An example of this focus on citizenship can be observed in the following field note:

It's a hot, humid Queensland school day, children sweaty and noisy move in from outside play time to the meeting place used for assembly. The principal moves

to the front and begins singing "Day-o" to which the children answer back "Day-o". The children are quiet now and the principal asks the teachers on duty in the designated play areas to report back from their areas. The teacher looking after the oval reports back "no issues on the oval today". The next teacher reports "no issues in the sandpit today". The principal asks what about the undercover area, to which the teacher begins to outline an issue with the tennis racquets. This discussion is had in front of the assembly with the children sitting and listening. The principal turns to the children and asks them to think about a plan for the use of the tennis racquets which could minimise the identified issue they are experiencing. This lasts for a few minutes before the principal ends the discussion with a trial of one of the ideas to be implemented that week. The principal then invites the Year Four teacher to address the group. The Year Four teacher outlines an initiative they are trialling in the Years Four to Seven area where the children in Years Four to Seven can leave their lunch area to interact with the younger children in the junior school. The teacher encourages the older children to "mingle with the younger children" and "make an effort to find out who they are". This is going to be trialled on the last day of term and there is to be a ban on basketballs and footballs that day so the older children can go down to the younger children's area and engage in some "sharing and caring and learning about others by talking and being with one another". The principal thanks the teacher for his input and reminds the children about the value of citizenship and as a small school this is something they pride themselves on. The children are dismissed and move with their teachers to their classrooms. (Field note: September, 2012).

This gathering of the school staff and students was called Pillars Parade and was held four days a week after play time. It was described by Melanie, the teacher in case study one, as "a kind of debrief session". On the fifth day of the week a more formal assembly was held, at which parents were welcome to attend.

The school does not operate a special education unit; children with disabilities are supported by the school's special education teacher and an advisory visiting teacher (AVT) service. A special education teacher is a specialist teacher who supports staff within the school. An advisory visiting teacher is a teacher who has specialist knowledge and skills that support the access and participation of students with disabilities (DETE, 2013). Their roles may encompass many areas including

working as a member of the educational team, participating in educational planning and program advice, the provision of information on strategies for teaching and learning and advocating for the supply of specialised equipment and professional development opportunities (DETE, 2013). The special education teacher at this particular school worked part-time within the school, working two days a week and has had no previous experience working with a child with Down syndrome in any other school contexts. The school itself has not had a child with a Down syndrome in their school community before.

4.2.2 Description of Classroom Context

Melanie's class was a Prep class, which was situated parallel to another Prep class. The building was a new demountable which had been positioned on the school grounds to cater for the recent growth in the Prep attendance at this school. The space was large and colourful. There was an adjoining office space shared by the two Prep classes.

In Melanie's class there were twenty-six children including Liam who has Down syndrome. Of the other children in the class, three children had verifications for various diagnoses, and one child was part of a program involving the Abused Children's Trust. The process of verification is carried out by verifiers associated with Education Queensland. Verification is the process where a student is identified in a category that is associated with activity limitations and participation restrictions and requires significant education adjustments (DETE, 2012). This process is described is Chapter Two. For children with Down syndrome the process of verification involves being identified in one of the six disability categories. The verification process also involves gathering data on the impairments and educational impacts of the impairments experienced by the student.

There was a teacher aide who worked in the morning and middle session within the class from approximately 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday. The teacher aide's role as defined by Education Queensland is to support teaching and learning in the classroom (DETE, 2010). Some of the areas teacher aides contribute to include working closely with teachers, developing resources and participating in teaching activities with the teacher (DETE, 2010). The teacher aide in Melanie's classroom began her day setting up activities, under the direction of Melanie. In the morning session she worked as part of the learning groups within the

classroom assisting children with tasks and usually positioned herself with a group assigned by Melanie. After group time, the teacher aide would often leave the classroom for a period of time to undertake administrative tasks. On morning tea break she worked on a rostered duty in the playground. In the second session of the day after morning tea the teacher aide worked with individual children on several tasks including reading and assessment tasks. It was in this session that the teacher aide withdrew Liam on some days to work intensively on tasks set by Melanie. This one-on-one work was done on a veranda area adjacent to the classroom. The classroom was still visible to the teacher aide from where she sat with Liam. The day's tasks were discussed between Melanie and the teacher aide predominantly at the beginning of the day before the children have arrived in class. Most mornings Melanie and the teacher aide would sit for approximately 15 minutes discussing the teacher aide's activities for the day. The following section provides a description of Liam, the child with Down syndrome in Melanie's class.

4.2.3 Description of the Child — Liam

Liam was six years old. He enjoyed reading, playing on his iPad, and playing in the sandpit with his friends. Liam has Down syndrome and had been identified as having a speech and language impairment. Liam had approximately two or three word utterances and did not use a recognisable form of sign language. Physically, Liam had been assessed by an occupational therapist as having limited core strength, and subsequently had difficulty sitting up straight and sitting for long periods. Liam's fine motor skills had been assessed as being very limited. A slope board was used to support Liam when he was writing at a desk. The slope board is a piece of equipment that has a low angled surface and is placed on the desk to bring the paper or piece of work closer to Liam, limiting the amount of bending over he needed to do. Liam was encouraged by Melanie to be responsible for his belongings within the class. Melanie had been observed by the researcher encouraging Liam to be responsible for putting his belongings away, caring for the maintenance of his glasses and carrying in and out of the office his slope board when needed.

Liam was toilet trained, both for urinary and faecal toileting. He did need regular toileting prompts from the teacher and teaching aide throughout the school day. Liam enjoyed interactions with the other children within the classroom. Inside he particularly enjoyed reading, music and movement time. Outside Liam

predominantly played in the sandpit, and enjoyed engaging with other children in the sandpit area.

Liam is the middle child in his family, with an older sibling and younger sibling. His older sibling had attended the school previously, with his younger sibling attending in the coming years. Liam lives at home with his mother and father.

Liam attended the Prep class on a full-time basis and received some support from the special education teacher at the school. This level of support was negotiated between Melanie and the special education teacher. For example, the special education teacher and Melanie had been observed discussing the speech program Liam engaged in, and when the most appropriate times for that was to occur. These discussions were often impromptu conversations observed occurring in the playground or before the morning session begins. Melanie relayed the information she has discussed with the special education teacher with the teacher aide. Liam was withdrawn from the class to work on speech and language by the special education teacher for two sessions a week. These sessions were approximately 30 minutes long. However, if Melanie believed Liam was working well in the class and was engaged in a group effectively she would ask that he not be withdrawn for that time. In those instances it was the teacher's decision whether or not Liam was removed from the class.

4.2.4 The Classroom Teacher —Melanie

Case study one involved a Prep teacher Melanie, who had been a teacher for thirty years. Six of her 30 years had been working at the school in case study one. Melanie knew or had taught many of the children in the school. On her wall was a newspaper clipping of her receiving an award for Teacher of the Year as voted by parents, staff and students at the school. Melanie worked full-time at the school.

This was Melanie's first experience working with a child with Down syndrome. However, over her teaching career she had taught many children with disabilities including autism spectrum disorder, children with physical disabilities and children with learning difficulties. In an initial interview with Melanie she relayed her views on inclusive education, including her definition of inclusion:

Everyone is different and there is a need to expect difference in teaching.
(Interview 1)

Melanie explained that her underpinning assumption about inclusive education was that children would succeed and not the opposite. She described children as not benefiting from a teaching approach which focused on what the child cannot do. Melanie referred to having an early childhood philosophy where she believed every child was unique, individual and capable. She described her main priorities as a teacher as empowering children to communicate and being responsive to their needs. Further to this Melanie commented that the child was always at the beginning point of the curriculum in her teaching:

> *I guess because of my early childhood background I start with the child at the beginning and then think about the curriculum. It is always about the child first, and if we start with the child and get to know them we can find where the curriculum fits with what they can do. That's the way I see it anyway.* (Interview 2)

When asked to elaborate, she described her preferred teaching approach as working with what the child was capable of doing and building on those skills. Melanie also described key components of her teaching approach as building independence in children and creating a positive classroom culture and learning environment. Melanie described her experiences of supporting a child with Down syndrome in her Prep class:

> *My experience has been absolutely wonderful; I think 30 years later I am still learning things about children and how children work, how children respond to children who are different. I think there is just so much to be gained from having children in your room who are different I think everybody gains, so it has been a very positive experience.* (Interview 2)

Melanie saw the children in her class as learners. She identified that as a teacher her role was creating learning behaviours, and learning skills such as being independent learners. As part of her teaching approach she appeared to have a very intentional focus on building a classroom community which was positive and empowering for children.

4.3 THEMES

The major themes from the data include: the classroom teacher's teaching approach; the teacher's perspectives on teaching to diversity within the classroom

context; and collaboration. Beginning with the classroom teacher's approach data from this theme is presented below.

4.3.1 Theme 1: The Classroom Teacher's Teaching Approach

Melanie's overarching approach to working with Liam in her classroom has been described by her as an expectation, adjustment and then support approach. She explains further:

> *I don't think there are any steadfast rules... I expect that he will participate to the maximum and then support and adjust as we go rather than thinking that he's not going to be able to do an activity.* (Interview 1)

Melanie used a strengths-based approach to her teaching. When including Liam in her class she did not focus on his weaknesses as a learner, but rather focused on his individual strengths in learning. She then capitalised on these strengths and plans for his learning accordingly. In the interviews, Melanie made many references to having high expectations for Liam in the classroom context and as a learner:

> *I think you need to expect and then make the adjustments and support. Don't expect that they are going to behave any differently or have any lower expectations for their learning because they are very rich and very capable and it comes back to the individuality of every child.* (Interview 1)

It is clear Melanie did not look at Liam from a deficit perspective. She challenged the assumption that because Liam had Down syndrome she should have lower expectations for his learning. Melanie viewed Liam as a competent, contributing member of the classroom and designed and implemented her pedagogical approaches accordingly. Her challenging of the assumptions of deficit discourses within her classroom had the potential to model to her class community a strengths-based perspective on disability. As a teacher Melanie was modelling inclusion as a guiding principle in her class through her own teaching approach. Teachers have the ability to disrupt cycles of deficit when they model high expectations for all learners and continually work to reduce barriers to learning for all children (Rietveld, 2005). She highlighted having goals as important to Liam's success as a learner and in learning:

> *Absolutely, we always have learning goals. We've nailed letter K so we move on for example. He knows the letters of the alphabet but now it's the writing and*

> *correct writing of the letters in his name. Targeting, always targeting the learning. First it was our numbers to five and writing L consistently for Liam, and then we upped it so second term we wanted the whole name and numbers to ten. And we got it, third term we are up to visual sight words and putting in sentences and reading. All the time making sure the goals are in reachable distance, never going beyond it, so he is feeling achievement.* (Interview 1)

Melanie described the Prep environment as being particularly conducive to being inclusive. The learning of all the children was individualised to a point where children were identified as having various levels of support needs. Due to the processes involved with several children being withdrawn for reading or writing support, Melanie felt there was no stigma attached to the times Liam was withdrawn from the class, as it was an accepted part of the day:

> *We do everything in the Prep room yeah, so there are times when we are all together as a group, times when we are in small groups, there is withdrawal of individuals and he takes part in all of those processes as well.* (Interview 1)

Reliance on other children in his learning community was a skill Melanie had deliberately focused on helping Liam develop. She described her views on Liam being reliant on his peers in the comments below:

> *It is not as if he is reliant on adults for help, he will ask the other children to zip up his bag for him or you know to help him in some other way. We make sure he is empowered with people, not just one person, but with people generally.* (Interview 1)

The children in Melanie's class were expected to assist one another. As a teacher Melanie used her role as a leader who through increased social participation with the class community built an inclusive class culture. Melanie described creating intentionally a learning culture which was built on a responsive environment where respect for one other within the class was important. The use of social participation seemed to be adopted by Melanie as a protective factor where Melanie constructed social interactions and placed a high value on them. She discussed a sense of empowerment which was achieved when the learning community was aware of their integral role in supporting one another. A supportive learning environment was noted in the observation sessions in the class where children willingly assisted one another,

asking others if they needed assistance often unprompted by Melanie. Melanie had also identified that Liam responded well to being given instructions from other children, as well as being given instructions by her as the teacher:

> *Liam loves to be taught by other children so it is not always me that is giving him instructions. You know I will give them to the other children – "Can you please go and help Liam with that?", "Can you make sure Liam is doing that or whatever?" He loves the help and integration with other children and not always adults.* (Interview 1)

To foster positive interactions within the class Melanie was able to incorporate Liam's interests into the classroom in a positive and engaging way. For example:

> *Liam loves to dance and sing so we always start the day in a happy way, we always dance and sing every morning so that sets the day for him.* (Interview 1)

Using Liam's interests within the day builds Liam's engagement in the teaching and learning context. Through the use of music Melanie suggested that she was further developing his learning disposition through engagement with activities he enjoys and for the class who see that validating individual interests places value on all students endeavours. Through this planning Melanie could be seen to be educating the whole child as she understood through engagement with activities Liam builds a positive learning disposition, and his enjoyment and happiness impacted positively on his learning experiences (Petrie, 2005). By developing this enjoyable start to the day Melanie was creating an environment where positive interactions and a positive climate work together to create an inclusive class community.

Melanie explained that Liam goes out of the class at times for speech and language work.

> *There are times when he is exited so he has intense speech/language support so he'll go three times a week for 15 minutes with a teacher aide and work on syllables or whatever it is we happen to be working on.* (Interview 1)

Building Liam's communication skills was a particular focus for Melanie. In conjunction with the special education teacher a communication program had been implemented which saw Liam exit the classroom for intensive speech and language

work. This displays an acknowledgment of individual areas to improve in Liam's educational profile which included Melanie using small group work as a feature of her teaching approach.

> *In the classroom sometimes I'll have to pre-empt that this is not going to be a meaningful activity, I need to provide more meaning but within the same context and within a small group, Liam loves to work with the other children so we are always ensuring that he isn't always working on his own but that he does have other children with him and is not being isolated at all.* (Interview 1)

The value of social participation was a characteristic of Melanie's teaching approach. Her implementation of learning through interactions and experiences created a basis for learning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) and promoted social skills such as building friendships, relating positively to others and other elements of a positive classroom climate (McLeskey & Waldron, 2007).

One of the supporting factors to Melanie's teaching practice was using visual cues and saw the removal of these visual cues as a potentially challenging factor for Liam's future learning once he left her class:

> *I think as he goes through the grades he will need extra visuals but being in Prep we are very visually supported. I know in Grade One visual timetables aren't used whereas in Prep we naturally use a visual timetable so lots of those support systems will need to be used for him.* (Interview 1)

Melanie appears to be cognisant that her approach to Liam's learning may not be sustained by other teachers as he progressed through the grades and expressed concern some supports may decline in older grades. Teachers of students in the lower grades of schooling are generally more positive towards meeting the individual needs of the student, than teachers working in the higher grades of schooling (Gately & Hammer, 2005; Spedding, 2008).

Melanie identified communication as the most challenging factor to her teaching when working with Liam. Although Liam had very limited language and used no identifiable signing system Melanie was observed encouraging Liam to use his words:

> *As I said he has only got 2 or 3 word utterances that are, probably two words that can be you know really explicitly understood. After that it becomes a very mixed mash of language but we let him speak.* (Interview 1)

Throughout the visits to Melanie's classroom it was evident that Liam was encouraged to practise his speech. Melanie encouraged this use of speech in many different contexts including within the class and in the wider school. For example, Melanie encouraged Liam to participate in oral communications both within the classroom and in the wider school context. These oral communications included providing feedback to the class in class learning experiences and presenting to the whole school as part of the class assembly presentation. Melanie identified communication as very difficult, particularly as Liam could not rely on his writing skills because of limited strength in his fingers. However, she identified increasing competence in his keyboarding skills on the iPad, which she felt may assist Liam with his future learning needs. When asked to describe the most challenging factors to her teaching practice she responded:

> *It's the communication, the communication is the part that really disheartens me and because he has such poor fine motor skills typing is not a good alternative at this stage. Writing is certainly not an alternative because of the fine motor so he's probably unfortunate that he has both of those things occurring, but my goal now is to increase the keyboarding skills on the iPad because it is so much more easier on an iPad than a keyboard. So by using the iPad to get some of those keyboarding skills happening eventually he will have an alternative to trying to speak.* (Interview 1)

Despite accepting that Liam had some challenges with communication, Melanie described that as a teacher she felt it was important for Liam to have a voice in the learning context. To overcome these challenges, Melanie and the school included Liam in all activities including speaking tasks:

> *We encourage him to speak and to do whatever he needs to do to communicate and then we interpret. An example is when our class had to give a report to assembly for our environment monitoring. We had to tell the school which classes had their fans and lights off. So we modelled the language and then Liam answered yes or no to what was being said. We always let him speak, then help to interpret. But we also let him validate what we are saying. So in front of assembly*

he got to present this information and our school thinks nothing of it. We treat him the same as everyone else. (Interview 1)

Liam used a symbol system of sorts to assist with communication. He used a core base of around four signs which included the sign for no, yes, toilet and food. Melanie identified Liam using some other symbols but she explained she did not know the meaning for these symbols. Melanie identifies learning Liam's symbol system as challenging:

*He'll use gesture mostly, he's got his own little symbol system that I don't know for some reason he was born with and I have had to learn his symbol system which has been hard. Some of the symbols are Makaton symbols that he has picked from his special education experience but some of them are just his symbols and we've all learnt those symbols. So he does use lots of gestures. (*Interview 2*)*

Makaton (The Makaton Charity, 2013) is a form of sign language which is based on using hand signs and gestures for key words. Liam's use of gesture and communication was observed in an interaction with Liam and another child relayed by Melanie:

Like today I asked him to put a piece of paper in the bin and one of the children came and got it and put it in the bin and he said "No". He was very cranky and he went and got the paper out of the bin and put it back on the floor and said "No Liam" and he picked it up and put it back in the bin himself and the other kid got the very strong message that you don't do anything for me unless I want you to, so he is pretty good at getting his message across even though his verbal isn't strong. (Interview 1)

Within the classroom Melanie encouraged Liam to use self-help skills and for the other members of the class to listen respectfully to what Liam was communicating. She encouraged the other children to not do Liam's tasks for him and take over activities he was capable of doing. By doing this Melanie was facilitating positive social skills and social participation where Liam had an authentic voice in the learning environment (MacArthur, Higgins, & Quinlivan, 2012). This approach assisted others in the class community to treat Liam with respect and to respect Liam's attempts at communication.

Melanie also highlighted challenges to her teaching practice, particularly in the area of communication. She explained, addressing the challenges that come with a child who has difficulty communicating:

> *I never had a Down syndrome child before, I just think you just keep going back to the child as a child not because they have got Down syndrome but as a child. Learn their limitations so their communication skills, what they can and can't communicate, and I think find out as much about them by talking to them, by getting down and talking to them and finding out as much as you can...Most of it is their ability to communicate their needs and the sooner you can cue into that whether they are using some hand symbols or whatever it is, the more that they feel that they are going to have a voice and be able to speak how they want to speak.* (Interview 2)

Strategies Melanie used to enhance Liam's communication were to model a rich language environment, the use of visuals to prompt his communication and the use of a iPad within the classroom. The following section describes Melanie's perspectives of diversity.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Perspectives of Diversity within Case Study One

This theme considers Melanie's perspectives on diversity and how it had factored into her experience of teaching a child with Down syndrome in her school and class. Before Liam began full-time at the school there was a protracted transition between the special education unit and school that included several visits by the principal and Melanie to the special education unit, and many visits by Liam and his parents to the school. Melanie described her visits to the special education unit prior to having Liam in her class:

> *Numerous times I went to the special ed unit and then Liam started coming to my room before any decisions were made. So we used to invite mum in to come in on the mornings and bring Liam and just observe Prep. Never any pressure we just sort of said this is what we do.* (Interview 2)

Throughout the first interview Melanie identified having Liam at the school was the first time this school has had a child with Down syndrome attend the school. Melanie states:

> *This has been our school's first experience; our special needs teacher is part-time and hasn't had this experience before either, a Down syndrome child, so I guess we are all learning at the same time.* (Interview 1)

Throughout the data collection Melanie referred to the word diversity numerous times. Together with the word diversity she frequently referred to her own early childhood teaching philosophy:

> *I guess it's because we are in early childhood that I just think that diversity is across all children and not just Down syndrome children. I think in early childhood we know that every child is unique and individual and capable.* (Interview 1)

She explained further:

> *With Down syndrome children you expect they're all going to be different, there's no two of them the same, so you know I would expect that if I had two Down syndrome children in the class I would have to deal with them completely differently as well. I think that is my strongest message, that don't focus on the Down syndrome child as anything different from any other child really, but just adapt and change as their needs arise.* (Interview 1)

This understanding of diversity was built on an understanding of the guiding principles of inclusion which was respect and value for all individuals and the challenging of barriers to learning (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). When asked how she believed her views on diversity impacted her teaching approach Melanie responded:

> *I think in early childhood we know that you need to be responsive to children's needs. You start with the child and build the relationship up from the start. Then if you have a good relationship, you know the child well and that then builds up the engagement. They want to learn. That is the most important thing actually, building the learning disposition, making them think learning is fun and building them into being a learner. I think in early childhood we know that is important and that every child is different.* (Interview 1)

Melanie mentioned wanting Liam to develop a positive attitude to learning and that this was a key role of hers as an early childhood teacher. There was a strong focus on relationships as the basis for Melanie's practice. This relationship with the child involved Melanie getting to know Liam as an individual and then building on

that knowledge. Seeing the child as a diverse learner within her class had implications for her as a teacher as it ensured she as a teacher had a very active role. If Melanie was to operationalise a more deficit discourse, she would locate deficits within the child (Oliver, 1996), instead, Melanie was aware her relationship with Liam was a key factor in his inclusion in the class. When asked what specific areas she wanted to build with regard to learning disposition she remarked:

> *I want Liam to want to know more. I want him to be curious as a learner and be engaged in learning, that's my goal for him this year.* (Interview 1)

Melanie clearly saw Liam as a learner and consequently took a large portion of the responsibility for Liam's development as a learner. Melanie acknowledged the important factor she played in Liam's learning and encouraged and challenged him to develop as a learner. Melanie's highly responsive teaching approach manifested in flexible classroom practices which maximised Liam's engagement within the class. In essence Melanie saw Liam as an individual learner who she took the time to build a relationship with. This in turn increased Liam's motivation as a learner which had the effect of increasing Liam's engagement in the teaching and learning dynamic. Melanie discussed her thinking about inclusive education and her approach to teaching to diversity:

> *I guess in our days we all have the philosophy or we should have the philosophy of inclusive education. The biggest example of that is expecting that your children are going to be different; every single one of them is going to be different no matter what they have associated with them. I think that is one of the misconceptions sometimes when I have student teachers they expect that they are all going to learn at the same pace. Whereas an experienced teacher, you expect that is not the case and you will have to present material a few different ways, and each time you will gather another momentum for another learner.* (Interview 1)

Melanie described that children are individuals with individual learning needs and as a teacher she was accountable for developing relationships which then facilitated optimal teaching and learning for all students. She discussed her philosophy on inclusive education within her school context:

> *We as a school have a responsibility for all children in this school. When I was asked by a teacher here at the school last week about whether Liam is ready to go*

> *up to Year One next year, I said to her "No it is not about whether Liam is ready for Year One, it should be are we ready for Liam in Year One?" The difference is children are children; it is our job as a school to be prepared for them. What are we doing to make sure Year One is ready for Liam?* (Interview 2)

This quote indicates Melanie's position that teachers have the power to disrupt cycles of deficit discourses which contribute to learning for all students based on their diverse needs. It would appear that Melanie's high sense of agency enabled her to voice her opinions and challenge deficit based discourses within her school community. This stance and her belief in her approach positioned her as an agent of change within the school who had the potential to challenge the status-quo (Ballard, 2012). There was a clear expectation that Liam was involved in all experiences of the classroom as were the other children in the Prep class. Melanie discussed the importance of belonging and including Liam in her classroom:

> *Liam wants to belong and to not be different, children want to belong so if you know you can support them rather than change things I think that is the key to belonging.* (Interview, 1)

Belonging and a sense of citizenship are important attributes to Melanie's teaching. Melanie appeared to have a very intentional aim for children to feel a sense of belonging in her classroom. This building of belonging, according to Melanie, increased the value placed on each student within her class as members of a class community. She described further that Liam participated in all classroom activities:

> *I don't think there is anything that we sort of need to exclude or say this is not for you and it is expected that he is part of everything. He does rotations with the rest of the group, he does whole groups, you know it is expected that he is part of our group and he also goes off for his individual time, like all the other children do.* (Interview 1)

Melanie explains there was a general assumption in her class that all the children are diverse and that their brains work in various ways and the group accepted each other for their differences. She discusses this further:

> *The children already know that all our brains work differently and you know how I can't click my fingers, he has difficulty saying words, this one has trouble sitting still, so we have already discussed these areas together.* (Interview 1)

Melanie discussed the need to not focus on the Down syndrome as a mechanism for planning, and to instead identify with the needs of the child as an individual:

> *I think that would be my strongest message that don't focus on the Down syndrome child as anything different from any other child really but just adapt and change as their needs arise. I think sometimes that if we go too far in doing a lot of pre-planning for them we're undervaluing what they can do. We're automatically assuming that they can't, rather than letting them have a turn and then make the adjustments as needed.* (Interview 1)

This approach displayed the commitment Melanie has to a diversity of learners. She used the individuality of students rather than rely on traditional teaching practices which she may have used in the past. Rather Melanie had the confidence to match her pedagogy to that which was required by the diversity of the student. There was however, an element of pre-planning evident in Melanie's teaching approach observed in field visits and document analysis. This pre-planning included strategies for when she noticed Liam was not engaged in a task or if she felt the task was too difficult. She explained this further:

> *Well you do have certain strategies there ready to go so that if things aren't flowing as well there are alternatives. So I've always got a little table set up, he loves doing puzzles and things like that so if I see him becoming disengaged at any stage I'll say iPad time or puzzle time and he'll go over to the table and just give himself a little bit of time. This allows me to work with the other children and come back over to support him so I guess you have to have a little bit of that up your sleeve as well. When you're looking at work sheets and things like that your thinking, well with his fine motor difficulties he's going to be able to do this bit, but not this bit so what is the alternative for that bit? What can I do so he is still getting learning but in a different way?* (Interview 1)

This reflected Melanie's work within more contemporary understandings of disability in that she did not identify deficit within Liam. Melanie did not view disengagement from learning tasks as relating to the fact that Liam has Down syndrome, she described that the environmental impacts had relevance as well. She also identified that as a teacher her role in keeping up Liam's engagement in tasks was an important aspect of further developing his learning. Melanie stated she does

not think her teaching approach was particularly relevant for Liam just because he has Down syndrome. Rather more broadly she described that children are individual and as a teacher you need to cater for a diversity of learners in the most effective ways possible. She explains this further:

> *Every year you get children from every end of the spectrum that you need to adjust and cater for. I don't think his needs have been very different to other children in other years. I don't think it has been a huge impact on having to run out and resource him any differently to what I would normally do with another child who wasn't able to sense everything at the same pace. I don't think the Down syndrome has much to do with it is what I am saying, I can think back to other years where I have had to do exactly same thing as what I am doing with Liam and it's not too different, besides the paperwork.*(Interview 2)

When asked if she was to give advice to other teachers working with a child with Down syndrome Melanie responded:

> *Absolutely get to know the child first, don't worry about the curriculum as that will come, leave that alone and just get to know your children – they don't put that in C2C do they, or give you a fortnight to get to know your children (laughs).*(Interview 2)

However, Melanie asks herself the following question when she felt Liam was not engaged in learning:

> *That engagement isn't happening; what's the alternative that I can do to make sure he is engaged in that learning? Then his learning needs will all go from there.* (Interview 1)

Melanie as a teacher displayed a high sense of teacher agency which saw her confident to employ flexible pedagogical choices determined by the individuality of her students. She viewed Liam as another diverse learner within her class community which enabled her to match her pedagogy to his needs. This reflected a more social model of understanding (Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009) of disability which did not see Melanie viewing Liam's learning needs as deficits she needed to fix. A clear understanding of her own teaching ideology was seen in valuing relationships as a basis for her pedagogical practices. From this foundation of relationships which was built on through respecting and valuing diversity of individuals, Melanie as a teacher

adapted her practice accordingly to best support the student's individual learning needs.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Collaboration

This section considers Melanie's experiences of collaboration when teaching a child with Down syndrome in her class. This theme is divided in two categories: within school collaboration; and collaboration with external agencies. Within school collaboration is defined in this study as any collaboration which exists within the classroom or school. This collaboration includes parents, support staff and visiting specialist teachers. Despite visiting teachers only periodically visiting the classroom and school, the nature of their visits within the classrooms defines them as within school collaboration. So too with parents even though they are external stakeholders the nature of their visits to the classroom context everyday defines them as within school partnerships in this research.

Within School Collaboration

There were a number of collaborative relationships identified by Melanie in her experience of supporting Liam. The relationships Melanie discussed included with the principal of the school, the special education teacher, the advisory visiting teacher, the support staff working within the classroom and Liam's parents. Elaboration of the various kinds and extent of support offered to Liam through each of these collaborations is provided below.

Melanie discussed initial conversations with the principal as being vital to preparing her for Liam's entry into her classroom. Both Melanie and her principal visited the special education unit Liam attended before coming to school on many occasions. According to Melanie these meetings were to ensure a collaborative relationship was facilitated between the two settings. Melanie described a conversation she had with the principal initially before Liam began at the school:

> *This is all unknown territory for us, so just making it a positive experience is the most important thing. Let's make him feel he's part of the school and let's make sure that the system is there from the word go.* (Interview 1)

This open discussion between staff at the school signals a climate of collaboration within the school. This school culture reflected the fact school cultures have the power to include or exclude students (Kearney, 2011). The underlying view

of inclusion at this school was that all students are diverse and they will adapt their practices to meet the learning needs of each child. Consciously signalling that their goal for Liam was to feel belonging in the school was based within a social model of disability which acknowledged the importance of the role of others within the learning community (Alton-Lee, 2003). Melanie's comments were not focused on remediating difficulties Liam may have had, or commenting on how difficult and challenging he may be, instead the focus was on setting up a school climate which was open and intentional. These conversations also displaed democratisation in leadership where teachers have a sense of buy-in in their role within building inclusive school communities (Carrington & Elkins, 2002). These open conversations are able to fuel proactive collaboration within the school built on mutual goals for students.

Mentioned in interviews with Melanie several times was the role of the special education teacher at the school. Melanie described a good working relationship with the special education teacher; however it was clear through observations, field notes and discussions that Melanie situated her role as the classroom teacher as taking ultimate responsibility for Liam within the school:

> *I am constantly talking with the others who I work with and telling them "No let him do it". Sometimes the special needs teacher intervenes too early so I tell her to wait sometimes and see what happens.* (Interview 2)

Melanie placed a high value on social interactions and experiences as potential learning interactions for Liam.

This is reflected in the following field note:

> *Liam is playing in the sandpit with four other children. They are digging a hole. Liam begins to flick the sand higher and some of the sand is sent onto the children's heads. The special education teacher and Melanie are standing to the side watching the children. The special education teacher begins to move toward the edge of the sandpit. Melanie says quietly to the special education teacher, "Let's just watch for a moment, and see what happens." They stand and watch. Liam flicks the sand up over the children again and one of the boys says to Liam "If you do that again Liam you won't be able to play in the sandpit". Liam puts his shovel down and watches the other children. The bell goes. Melanie turns to*

> *the special education teacher and says "Sometimes it is better to leave it and let them sort it out". The children begin to move out of the sandpit to put on their shoes.* (Field note September, 2012)

In another example in the classroom the special education teacher came into the classroom and asks Melanie if Liam was able to come with her for some one-on-one work. Melanie asked the special education teacher if they could leave it for another time as Liam was very engaged in the activity he was doing in the class. The special education teacher agreed and left the room. The relationship between the special education teacher and Melanie was respectful, however it was characterised by Melanie's ability to assert her own beliefs as a teacher and the high level of confidence in her own teaching practice she had. Her belief in Liam as a competent leaner had the potential to model to the special education teacher the value of experiential learning for Liam. In the relationship between Melanie and the special education teacher it was clear Melanie felt ultimate responsibility for Liam's learning. Melanie was happy to collaborate with the special education teacher but did so in an assertive way guided by her own professional judgements as a teacher.

This relationship between Melanie and the special education teacher could not be seen as an equal partnership as clearly Melanie had more power in the relationship however, it appeared to be a relationship borne out of respectful interactions and value for one another's place within the school. The apparent power difference did not seem to be detrimental to the relationship as fundamentally it appeared to be based on sharing and support for one another. Melanie was not prepared to defer to the specialist teacher's early intervention and withdrawal of Liam from the class if she felt it was not warranted. Perhaps in asserting her own beliefs this provided the special education teacher with a rethinking opportunity about how she saw Liam as a learner.

Melanie described on several occasions the paperwork associated with having a child with a disability included in her classroom. The paperwork she referred to is mandated by Education Queensland (DETE, 2013). Collaboration with the special education teacher had eased some of the burden she felt associated with paperwork:

> *There is a fair bit of paperwork; we have to enter it twice now. We do the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and now we have to go through the interview on the system so that is my next two Wednesday lunchtimes. I think that is one of*

> *Education Queensland's downfalls is that they don't allocate time to do this paperwork; they just assume it will happen. I am lucky we do have a fantastic special needs teacher who sucks all that up and takes as much of that burden off me as she can.* (Interview 2)

To facilitate the actioning of the paperwork needed to include a child with a disability into her classroom Melanie suggested that it would be useful if special needs teachers could have non-contact days to step into the teacher's role while the teacher is doing other administrative tasks:

> *I think the special needs teacher needs non-contact days to be able to give us time to come off class and do some of this. I think if we are valuing teachers then we need to say it is worthwhile taking teachers off classes to do these extra jobs.* (Interview 2)

Within the classroom there was a teacher aide who held a teacher aide qualification, and worked in the room for the morning and middle sessions from Monday to Friday. When asked to describe how she worked with the teacher aide in the room Melanie explains:

> *Support staff: I tend to use them more as an overseer, more than you are Liam's personal carer. They are an overseer and are always there but I don't want them hovering ready to sort of do whatever he needs. I set tasks for the teacher aide for all of the children and she has set tasks for them. She takes him out for speech/language tasks and assessment tasks, but it not as if he has her by his side all day every day. I don't want him to have that experience, I want him to know that he is his own person and he can rely on everybody in the classroom for support.* (Interview 1)

Melanie identified that very individualised and structured support within class from the teacher aide could in fact present a barrier to Liam's learning. As such she designed the role of the teacher aide with this in mind, indicating that she had discussed how she saw the role of the teacher aide within the classroom with the teacher aide. Throughout the day the teacher aide and Melanie could be observed discussing many aspects of the day. The teacher aide was included within the class community as an integral part of the team, however was used not as Liam's direct support but as a support for the whole class.

Melanie was very clear about the role of the support staff within her classroom. She was observed in the observation sessions providing the teacher aide with very explicit instructions for tasks such as ensuring learning sessions were not too lengthy and that there was adequate time given to Liam to respond to questions. Melanie also advised the teacher aide to allow Liam to answer the questions verbally initially to check for understanding, and then to have Liam attempt to write the answers. On several occasions Melanie mentioned her intentions for the teacher aide within the classroom:

> *She (teacher's aide) is always spread out so she is not peeking over his shoulder or making sure. I trust him (Liam) and yeah he does draw on his face if he gets a little wayward and he will draw on his hands if the task is no longer meaningful to him. That's a symbol for me that his mind is now somewhere else. He is not reliant on adults for help; he will ask the other children to zip up his bag for him or to help in some other way. It is important to make sure the teacher's aide is not doing everything for him.* (Interview 1)

There was evidence of a collaborative relationship between Melanie and the teacher's aide which was manifest as a very collegial working relationship. This collaboration was observed repeatedly through the observation sessions. However, Melanie gave a very clear structure to how she believed Liam should be supported within the classroom with clear instructions and intentions for Liam's classroom experience.

There was another collaborative relationship that featured many times in the data and that was with Liam's parents. Melanie described her feelings about Liam's parents.

> *The parents have been very supportive, and it has been a case really of them accepting not to compare their child with a child of similar ages. I think that has been a big learning experience, just accept Liam for who he is.* (Interview 2)

When Melanie was asked if there were any particular concerns the parents raised with her over the past year she responded:

> *I think mostly the issues were more to do with the actual learning support and how was he (Liam) going to get the support he needed in accessing the curriculum and*

> *being able to develop. You know she (mother) was worried he wasn't going to learn like the other children and what was I going to do about that.* (Interview 2)

When Melanie was asked if there were any particular strategies used with the parents to facilitate communication, such as a communication book, she responded:

> *No I don't need a communication book. We did have one at the start of the year but it was more so Liam could give the mother some prompts about the day and so she could prompt him and have some input about the day. As his vocab has increased we found we didn't need it. The mother can now ask him what he has done when she comes into the room, if he can't tell her I help out. And that is more personal anyway.* (Interview 2)

Melanie describes having conversations with Liam's mother on most days. She also noted another strategy she used to facilitate communication with the parents:

> *The iPad has been fantastic. I have started taking photographs here in the class and he takes them home and talks with mum about them and they bring in photographs from home on a Monday and this has been excellent. It helps us when mum comes in the afternoon and looks at the photos of what he has done and then validates his learning and also he can replicate what he has done last thing in the afternoon. And then mum is really keen to show dad and that empowers every kind of learning experience we have.* (Interview 2)

Through the use of the iPad Melanie created opportunities for Liam to develop his sense of agency using communication and to remove barriers to his learning (Croser & Bridge, 2012). Using the iPad as a communication tool increased parental involvement with the school in a meaningful way, offering an insight to what Liam was doing within school times. This exchange promoted a collaborative parent/teacher relationship while developing Liam's skills as a learner. It was clear Liam's parents were welcomed within the classroom on a sustained and meaningful basis. As Liam built his competence and identified as a learner through scaffolded opportunities such as with the iPad, Melanie saw this as permeating positively through many aspects of his development.

Liam's family was already part of the school community as Liam's older brother attended the school in an older grade, however as Liam attended the special

education unit he did not come to the school very often. As discussed in Section 4.2.1 of this chapter, there was an element of citizenship evident within this school. This could be observed through interactions with the children, staff and support staff within the school. Children were encouraged to support one another and their competency and capabilities were encouraged. An example of this encouragement to assist one another was observed it the following field note taken in the playground at morning tea:

> *It is nearing the end of playtime. Liam is in the sandpit with several other children. The duty teacher lets the children know the bell is about to ring and encourages them to begin putting their shoes back on. A girl in Year Two asks Liam if he would like some help. The special education teacher walks over and says "It's ok I will do it" to the child in Year Two. Melanie overhears and says to the special education teacher "No let him do it, or let the others help him, they can do it". The special education teacher walks away. The bell sounds. The child in Year Two continues to help Liam with his shoes. The children are moving toward the parade which happens before class. I ask Melanie if the child in Year Two will be worried about being late for parade. Melanie laughs and says "No she won't be in trouble; she will be praised for helping Liam".*
> (Field note: September, 2012)

The final internal collaborative relationship evident in Melanie's teaching was with the advisory visiting teacher (AVT). Despite not having day-to-day contact with Melanie, the AVT had been included as an internal collaboration as the role of the AVT visited Melanie within her classroom. At the time of this data collection the AVT who had previously been in the role had left the position. In her role as AVT she had visited the school and classroom and discussed Liam's needs with Melanie. A temporary AVT visited Melanie to assist her to support Liam's needs in her classroom. She had no scheduled appointments with Melanie and was operating on a 'drop in' basis when she was close by visiting other schools until a permanent AVT could be found for the region which encompassed Melanie's school. Melanie described the success of the collaboration with the AVT's as having been marred by staffing issues and issues of uncertainly regarding the role played by the AVT:

> *The start of the year we had so many changes. I think at the beginning of the year there was a role change and we were a bit confused as to who was in the role. We*

> *thought the AVT was to support Liam but probably we had at the most four visits. Usually, she just pops in and everything looks fine so we haven't had to do too much with the AVT.* (Interview 2)

Melanie mentioned confusion as to the role of the AVT. This confusion could potentially lead to undermining teachers' work. Melanie however, appeared to be confident in her teaching approach with a high level of teacher efficacy which saw her continue on despite the instability of support from the AVT. Melanie identified that there was one crucial role the AVT did play in Melanie's experience and that was advising of a conference that Melanie was eligible to attend. The conference Melanie referred to was run by the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland (Down Syndrome Association of Queensland Inc, 2010). It holds a yearly conference which teachers, support staff and parents are invited to attend over two days:

> *See it was through a visiting AVT that told me about the conference, our school didn't know about it until the AVT said and the AVT only comes haphazardly and I had no idea. It was only through luck that she mentioned it, and had come out because we had another change of AVT and she just popped in. I think the expectation is we can just do these things with children with disabilities with very little background and it's kind of learning on the run.* (Interview 2)

External Agencies

The above data leads into Melanie's engagement with an external agency she mentioned consistently throughout the data collection. This collaboration was in the form of a conference Melanie attended. As mentioned previously, this conference opportunity was not a scheduled professional development opportunity Melanie sought out, her attendance at the conference was only initiated via a passing remark from the advisory visiting teacher. Melanie explains:

> *I wish I had had that experience earlier, that knowledge earlier it would have been a huge benefit to draw on. Just understanding different parts of Down syndrome, I knew very little and only what I had read on the internet. And sometimes it is that background that then makes you feel more comfortable with your decisions and your own planning.* (Interview 1)

After attending the conference Melanie was able to reflect that she had very little understanding of Liam's aetiology related to Down syndrome. She considered

this as impacting her educational decisions. Melanie observed that as a teacher understanding the health implications and aetiology of Down syndrome when she began teaching Liam would have increased her ability as a teacher to successfully include Liam in her class. Melanie suggested understanding Down syndrome more fully would have assisted her in intentionally using that information to guide her own planning decisions. When asked about the enabling factors that assisted her with supporting Liam in her class, Melanie identified the conference she attended as a very significant positive factor in her experience.

> *We were not empowered a lot in this area, this has been our school's first experience, and our special needs teacher is part-time and hasn't had this experience having a Down syndrome child so I guess we are all learning at the same time. The conference has been the best thing that I have had to support me and what I am doing and how I am going about things.* (Interview 1)

When questioned further about why the conference was so pivotal, Melanie explained:

> *It enabled me to reflect on some of the things I could be doing and gave me the background knowledge I needed. Seeing things differently, I didn't know the thyroid was associated with Down syndrome, I knew about the vision but didn't know about the hearing problems that came with that. I didn't know they were susceptible to ear infections and Liam does get that, now I understand that those things are part of a broader make-up.* (Interview 1)

Liam had experienced several health implications throughout the year Melanie had spent as his teacher. The conference where Melanie was able to learn about specific health implications of Down syndrome was regarded by her as extremely important to her effectiveness as Liam's teacher. The conference provided an impetus for her to reflect on her practices in light of her new knowledge. She deduced that knowing about the health implications would have enabled her to be more effective. Melanie described that there were several gaps in her knowledge about Down syndrome, despite the fact she had sought out some information from the internet at the beginning of the year. She mentioned not knowing about hearing problems and possible thyroid dysfunction, both areas which could dramatically affect the educational planning for a child with Down syndrome.

Melanie was asked if she felt the conference had any impact on her teaching approach and she replied that she felt the conference had validated a lot of her choices but she had particularly been able to increase her knowledge about the use of iPads in the classroom as a result of her attendance at the conference. The conference Melanie attended gave her an opportunity to create new knowledge and skills in teaching Liam. As part of her responsive approach to teaching Liam she reflected on what she learnt from the conference and then implemented and improved her practice accordingly. Operating from what appeared to be a high base of confidence Melanie displayed a willingness to adapt her teaching approach in light of the new information she was exposed to. This willingness to reflect on her practice despite being a teacher for thirty years displays a strong commitment to attributes of a lifelong learner, including the promotion and building of competencies aligned with her teaching (Department of Education and Training, 2005).

Case study one has presented Melanie's experiences of teaching a child with Down syndrome in her classroom. Melanie's teaching approach, her perspectives on diversity and the identified support structures Melanie used when teaching Liam have been presented. Case study two begins in the following section.

4.4 CASE STUDY TWO

4.4.1 Introduction

This section presents results from case study two. As with case study one, the intention in this section is to first contextualise the case with an overall description of the school, the class, the child, Michael, and the teacher, Angela. In case study two there was a full-time school officer assigned to the child with Down syndrome, so a description of this school officer, Tammy is also given. School officer is the term used within this school for the teacher’s aide. Second, three overarching themes revealed in the data are presented. The three overarching themes in case study two mirrors those of case study one and include: the classroom teacher’s teaching approach, perspectives on teaching to diversity within the context of this particular setting, and collaboration.

4.4.2 Description of School Two

School two was situated in an urban area of metropolitan Brisbane, located approximately fifteen minutes from the city. It is located in a precinct that has two other schools close by in a predominantly residential area. The school had undergone

significant renovations to its oval and buildings in recent times. The major structure of the school is centred on a large quadrangle, with the classrooms surrounding the outsides of the quadrangle. Before Michael attended this school the staff at the school had not previously had a child with Down syndrome attend.

There was approximately an enrolment of 600 hundred students at the school, of those in Year Three (Michael's year) there was around 70 students. The school is co-educational for students from Prep to Year Four, with the girls continuing through Years 5-7. The boys continue on to other schools within the area. There are 23 full-time classroom teachers and a full-time learning support teacher within the school. In addition there are four school officers who worked within the school. The role of the learning support teacher is described as working in a collaborative partnership with the school's leadership, teachers, parents, consultants and other professional in fostering a school culture that enhances the educational outcomes for all students (Archdiocese of Brisbane, Catholic Education Council, 2010).

This school is a Catholic parish school and a member of the Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) system in the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane. The school reflected the ethos of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters and Friars. There were four Franciscan values adopted within the school which include 1) respect for each person's uniqueness, 2) a shared responsibility for the development of each member of the school family, 3) thankfulness for all things as gifts from God, and 4) the value of contemplation. The school prospectus reflects a focus on the latest in teaching and learning, technology and a high quality inclusive Catholic school. The prospectus described the school as offering a holistic education that encouraged personal growth based on Christian values.

4.4.3 Description of Classroom Context

Angela taught 26 children in a Year Three class. Four of the children in her class had been through the process of verification of learning disabilities through the Catholic Education system determining various levels of additional support needed. Some of the verifications included two children with hearing impairments and two other children with learning difficulties, including a child with Dyslexia. The verification process is part of the Education Adjustment Program (EAP) that identifies the educational adjustments that are provided by the school to meet the

learning and teaching needs of students with disabilities (Archdiocese of Brisbane, Catholic Education Council, 2007).

Angela's classroom was quite small. There was a carpeted area towards the back of the room with groups of four desks stationed around the carpeted area. Michael sat at the back of the room. The children worked predominantly at their desks. Towards the back of the room there was a listening post set up with headphones. Angela's desk was situated to the front of the room. It was a single classroom, located in a row of classrooms.

At the back of the classroom was a cluster of four desks set apart from the others. It was here where Michael sat for most of the class time. Tammy, the school officer, sat beside him at a desk and the other two desks were taken by two children who had hearing impairments.

Michael had a four drawer filing cabinet located at the front of the classroom which had his name on it. In the drawers were resources Michael used as well as paperwork and books the teacher and school officer used. Angela had explained that the filing cabinet moves with Michael every year to the next classroom he is in. The following section provides a description of Michael, the child with Down syndrome in case study two.

4.4.4 Description of the Child —Michael

Michael was nine years old and was in Year Three. He was on a split placement with two days at this school and three days at a local special school. Michael particularly enjoyed listening to music on the headphones attached to the listening post. Michael is an only child who lives at home with his mother and father. He was not fully toilet trained, and assistance during the day with toileting, both for urinary and faecal toileting was necessary. He wore nappies to school. The school officer usually assisted Michael with toileting.

Michael has difficulty concentrating for long periods, often when working at a desk he would repeatedly try to get up and move around the class. At other times Michael appeared not interested in learning activities and would sit on the floor refusing to participate. At these times the teacher or school officer encouraged Michael to rejoin the group, sometimes with success and other times the result was

leaving him to sit where he chose. In terms of social interactions, there was limited social interaction noted with the other children.

At break times Michael sat with other children with the school officer, but he did not interact with the other children. At times it was observed that other children initiated conversations with Michael, but he reciprocated by looking at them only. In the playground Michael was active, moving around playing with balls and other physical equipment. Michael wore a hat with a red ribbon around it as he had run off several times. The red ribbon was so he could be easily seen at playground time in the playground by both the staff and children.

At times Michael experienced difficulty with loud noises and crowds. His most enjoyable learning experiences were related to music, singing and dancing. He also enjoyed using equipment borrowed from the Down Syndrome Association of Qld which included sensory activities, counting boards, manipulative equipment, and games. It was noted that Michael had a tendency to tire early. Michael also enjoyed working on the iPad which he bought in from home with him. The iPad was used for communication as Michael had very limited verbal language communication.

Michael had been identified as being vision impaired, intellectually impaired and had Down syndrome. An excerpt from Michael's 2012 school report described Michael as:

> *A happy and quiet member of the Year Three classroom. He is greeted by the teachers and he responds accordingly. Michael is learning familiar peers and adults names and is using them with prompts. He knows where his things are and puts them away or collects them for himself when it is time to use them again. Michael is learning to sit with the class and partake in activities without moving.* (Document 1)

Angela described the level at which Michael was working in her classroom:

> *I would say Michael is probably working at a toddler stage, back at around two or three year old, but his body is actually at an eight or nine year old trying to relate to kids who are in our average functioning students.*(Interview 2)

Michael was an active child who enjoyed spending time in the outdoor areas at break times. Angela described those break times as difficult to supervise Michael:

> *He needs someone with him all the time whether it's the class teacher or a school officer, he at times will just run off. It depends on the day; no two days are the same.* (Interview 2)

Angela described an incident that occurred earlier in the year which had prompted her to use supports to minimise the chances of the incident occurring again:

> *I did lose him at the start of the year as he ran away to follow a kite around the multipurpose tennis court. It's really important that the gates are closed and you know I've got the kids so well trained up now, that if they see him going they tell me straight away. I also make sure he wears a red ribbon on his hat so I can see him better.* (Interview 2)

In terms of Michael's learning Angela described difficulty in ascertaining how he would present in the classroom each day for different learning tasks:

> *Some days he wants to work, sometimes he is not interested at all. He tries to dictate the day to us.* (Interview 2)

When asked about Michael's school program, Angela described a fully individualised program that had been designed to facilitate Michael's needs:

> *He does a completely different program, nothing even near what the other kids do and even earlier than what Prep children would be doing. We get quite excited when we see he has attempted to write his name and doing it by himself, so that's a big achievement and you can see that growth. If you look back through his really early books to what he is doing now you can see the growth, but it is not very consistent growth.* (Interview 2)

Michael's place within this school was secured on a year by year basis and renegotiated every year. Angela explained that Michael's parents are members of the Parish community and the school offered Michael a place within the school because of the parents' involvement with the Parish. However that placement was not guaranteed. Angela elaborates:

> *Every year Michael's placement is negotiated. His placement at the school is not for an academic focus but really for social and religious reasons. We are renegotiating his placement now for next year.* (Interview 2)

4.4.5 The Classroom Teacher—Angela

Angela had been working full-time at this school for four years. She had been a teacher for nine years in the Catholic Education system. For most of her teaching career Angela has taught in a Prep environment. Her teaching degree was in an early childhood specialisation. Angela's mother was an experienced early childhood teacher also and she worked at this school as well. This was Angela's first experience working with a child with Down syndrome in her class. Angela had worked with children with autism spectrum disorder and other learning difficulties before as well as children with English as a second language. She taught Michael on a Thursday and Friday in her classroom, the other days Michael attended a local special school.

Angela described a sense of responsibility that had come with being the class teacher of a child with a disability.

> *I toil with realising that I am a classroom teacher and I am responsible for Michael, not so much the school officer, I am the one who is accountable to parents, to the learning support people, the administration team, Brisbane Catholic Education, so I suppose it comes all back to the teacher. The teachers are the ones who are accountable for these children in the classroom and you sort of in a sense have to know everything about them if you can.* (Interview 1)

Angela described difficulty in balancing the needs of Michael with the other children in her class.

> *I would love to spend more time with Michael on a one-on-one basis because he does have a lot to give but realising that there are 25 other kids in the class it is not always easy. It is hard to do that, and whilst you know that is important, how you balance this in your classroom is probably the hardest things that I toil with.* (Interview 1)

On one occasion Angela described her understanding of inclusion, how she conceptualised inclusion, and what it meant for her in her classroom.

> *I often think about what others have said to me about the idea that doing things the same for each child is not inclusion. I really struggle with this; I was at a conference where one of the speakers said you need to tailor support to the kids in your class. This is great, but how do we do it for Michael was what I was thinking.*

> *I need my class to be working towards doing the learning that is expected by admin and by parents, not just doing their own thing.* (Interview 2)

Angela described being unsure about how to balance the learning needs of the class and Michael's needs. This uncertainty may have contributed to affecting Angela's sense of efficacy as a teacher. Efficacy as a construct is a fluid one, which sees negative experiences impact negatively on how a teacher sees themselves which in turn affects their ability to act when challenged (Bandura, 1977).

When asked about her view of inclusion Angela replied:

> *I guess it is having kids with disabilities in your school and class, everybody learning about kids with disabilities in their school community. Our school is very inclusive like that. We take kids from all sorts of backgrounds and I guess that is because we are a Christian school.* (Interview 1)

Angela described her view of inclusion as children with disabilities physically being in a general education setting. She described that year as being one of the hardest years for her as a teacher thus far in her career. She stated:

> *I just feel this year I am completely worn down, it has been so hard. No one gave me any information and to be honest I have been flying blind for most of this year just trying to do my best with Michael.* (Interview 1)

Angela described feeling under supported within her school. Lack of information and systemic support had left Angela feeling isolated and unsure about her practices.

She elaborates:

> *Sometimes it is a get through the day, sometimes he can be quite obligant (participant's own word) and sometimes it's really difficult and you've nearly had enough of him by the end of the day. Sometimes even Tammy (school officer), you look at her at the end of the day and she is exhausted. Sometimes you just can't get him (Michael) back to being composed.* (Interview 1)

4.5 THEMES

4.5.1 Theme 1: The Classroom Teacher's Teaching Approach

When describing her teaching approach Angela mentioned several times concerns she had over the nature of Michael's split placement between this school

and the special school he attended. The concerns Angela had related to the different approaches between the two settings. Angela visited the special school to observe Michael in that setting and when asked if there were any factors she was able to consider in her teaching approach she replied:

> *It's hard to say because I've been for a visit before to the special school before I took Michael on this year and it is very iPad based, so they listen a lot through the iPad, sitting at the tables and there is a small group of about five children so the environment is very different. In that case Michael was the highest level thinker in a sense compared to the other children, so seeing him in that situation was very different to what we have here in my classroom setting, where in comparison to his peers and age range, well he's very different.* (Interview 2)

In Angela's language it can be identified she used a medical model of disability where she positions Michael as having deficits compared to the other children his age (Oliver, 1996).

When asked to elaborate further between the differences between the approaches at the two school settings, Angela mentioned having some concerns over the variance in teaching strategies and approaches:

> *My fears from the other school is I'm not sure as to the level of technology they incorporate into their day, they're trying to get the iPads to compensate for their talking and routines whereas I'm a bit of an old stickler where I try and expect that he needs to learn to say things. He needs to ask for help, I like him to do a lot of fine motor and gross motor stuff with pencil grip and painting, blocks and I don't know…what I've seen is that they only do the technology but I'm sure they do many other things, whereas what I try and do is use my early childhood background and go, O.K. the things that are really important are the skills you need for learning and growing.* (Interview 2)

Angela's response indicated a very teacher directed approach to her teaching. She valued student compliance and participation and expected a level of control with the student doing what was asked of them. Angela's focus on Michael being able to express when he needed help with words is problematic. With limited verbal language, this maybe an unrealistic goal for Michael to achieve. Angela described her teaching approach as heavily influenced by her early childhood background. The

use of engagement strategies in her teaching Angela attributed to her early childhood background and considered this knowledge as being of benefit to her experience with Michael:

> *Because of my early childhood background I suppose I can spot things that can get missed in Year Three in terms of gross motor and fine motor, they're always the root to learning in a sense. I am lucky that I do have an early childhood background; I guess I have a lot of information on the foundations of learning and am quite aware of them and in tune with them. I realise that music and rhymes and those sorts of things are really important in the early stages of early childhood. I will often use them as an engagement tool with Michael.*(Interview 2)

Angela mentioned using engagement strategies she was familiar with. However, she did not indicate using Michael's interests and skills as a basis for engagement. Angela appeared to use a developmentalistic foundational approach to her teaching which was guided by linear development of skills (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). She particularly discussed this developmental approach in terms of gross and fine motor. When asked how her early childhood background had specifically influenced her teaching approach with Michael she replied:

> *I don't really know, just drawing on prior resources I had from my early childhood background I think that really did help me in understanding what he needs to do to get more out of learning.*(Interview 1)

Angela discussed Michael's learning as understanding what he needs to do to maximise his learning. However, she did not refer to other significant factors such as her role as a teacher and the learning environment in maximising Michael's learning. This was consistent with operating from a deficit discourse which identifies deficits within Michael which somehow needs to be fixed in order for him to learn effectively (Oliver, 1996).

When asked how she structured the learning environment in her class Angela described preferring children to sit together in groups at their desks:

> *I'm a teacher that likes kids to work in groups and I like that fact because I can get around every table and I can move around the room. I have done rows but it's not for me, at times there is a place for it, but my teaching style is that I like kids to communicate in groups.* (Interview 2)

Angela described having high expectations for Michael as a key part of her teaching approach. However, there was evidence that in tandem with high expectations, there was a need for her to have a level of flexibility in her approach. For example:

> *I guess it is just having those high expectations and knowing what you want before the year starts and then you can make modifications, well this hasn't worked what can we do instead, or that didn't work, let's try this instead.*(Interview 1)

Angela described a level of flexibility in her teaching approach. However, she mentioned knowing what you want before the year begins which suggests she was not factoring in relationships with students as determining factors of how she would engage students in the teaching and learning process. She explained her high expectations before the year begins which does not appear to leave time to get to know the individual children coming into her classroom and their own individual learning profiles.

When asked why she thought it was important to have high expectations Angela replies:

> *For me at the start of the year last year he was just doing a lot of work on the floor but this year I was determined he was going to sit at the desk. I had seen him at a special school sitting at this desk and not get up so I knew he could do it. So I expected it and when he got out of the chair we put him back in the chair, if he got up again, we put him back again. (Interview 1)*

Angela's high expectations appeared to relate to her expectations as a teacher and a level of control within the classroom which she described as necessary. It has been noted that high expectations alone can pose a threat to student's learning, and that high expectations need to be supported by effective pedagogical supports to facilitate learning (Alton-Lee, 2003). Angela related why having high expectations was part of her teaching approach:

> *I do definitely believe it is important to expect appropriate behaviour. I am a bit of the old believer that the child should do what they are told and there is time for fun and play but if you asked to do something you do it and shouldn't always have to be rewarded for that.* (Interview 1)

There are many reasons why Michael may not be able to meet these high expectations of behaviour set by Angela including feeling disengaged in learning experiences, being tired related to health issues, not understanding the task set out for him, or being engrossed in a learning experience (Jones, Neil, & Feeley, 2014). When questioned as to why she thought an expectation of appropriate behaviour was important Angela described concerns about Michael's future:

> *I just think in terms of getting away with things, he is getting older and stronger and he can't just do what he wants because as he gets older he just can't do what he wants.* (Interview 2)

> *The challenging part at times I find is how far I expect of his behaviour. For example on Friday afternoon at assembly he started to refuse to go up to the hall because I suppose it's a little bit noisy and there are a lot of people around. So it was a case that we got him up there and we sat him at the back but he did not want to be there so I've had to sit there and pretty much restrain him. In a sense I wanted to win the battle and wanted him to sit there like everyone else is doing as this is my expectation. But you've got all these other parents looking at you and you're going, ok, do I just give in and let him do what he wants to do or do I just persevere with this. It's really tough because sort of like how far do you go (visibly teary) and you don't want your reputation to be about what you did at assembly the other day you know.* (Interview 2)

Angela's sense of efficacy as a teacher was affected as she worried about what other people were thinking of her when they saw this happen. As her confidence levels go down and she had more emotional responses to this situation she appeared to want to exert more control over the situation. Clearly these kind of instances affected her greatly as a person and a teacher as when she describes it several months later she was still visibly upset when discussing the incident.

In further discussions regarding her high expectations Angela provided a caveat to her response of having high expectations with practical implications including:

> *In terms of goals and expectations sometimes it is just a get through the day. A lot of the times he will throw tantrums and there will be tears, but you have to be tough.* (Interview 2)

With Angela's comments regarding just making it thorough the day it is possible the more emotionally drained she became the more affected her sense of efficacy and empowerment as a teacher was (Bandura, 1977). Angela began to operate almost on a 'survival' mode which she equated to just getting through the day in a defeatist manner. From this position it was difficult for Angela to be innovating new practices, implementing new knowledge and critically reflecting on her pedagogical approaches. Rather she was just focusing on how she would emotionally and physically make it through the day. In the above response Angela married the terms goals and expectations in the same response. When asked about the relationship between having goals and expectations for Michael in her classroom she responded:

> *It's really difficult because you might have all these great goals and expectations for his behaviour and I mean I look at the goals we set up at the start of the year and we really haven't achieved much. But at the same time, even though we haven't achieved much we've achieved so much. He came at the start of the year and wasn't writing his name but he can now at least attempt to write his name independently and he's starting to say the letters of his name. But I mean we have been doing that every day for the whole school year, so it's just really repetitive stuff for Michael and that is probably the key really, just being repetitive.* (Interview 2)

This was the first time Angela mentioned academic learning goals. Michael's behaviour remained a focus for Angela. Angela did not appear to conceptualise Michael as a learner within the group, she focused on his progress as deviating from where she observed his learning should be compared to children of a similar age. The concept of learning and teaching described by Angela was based on application of knowledge and moving towards pre-determined goals (Macartney & Morton, 2013).

Angela described a key element to her teaching approach was being prepared. This preparation involved planning goals for Michael's program within the class:

> *I sit down at the start of each term and look at what kind of goals I would like to establish, not so much the ones that are directly related to the individual education plan because sometimes I find they're not achievable. I find those goals aren't always practical enough so you have to kind of break them down into more of an individual step by step focus.* (Interview 2)

Angela considered the goals she had for Michael regularly, however when she referred to the goals she talked about the goals she would like to establish. When asked to describe further the nature of the individual education plan's goals and why she felt they were not practical enough she replied:

> *In terms of goals the individual education plans' goals, they are so airy fairy, you can't see them in practice, I break them down into achievable goals. We are moving away from that whole IEP system Cath Ed is changing that system a bit anyway.* (Interview 2)

When asked what changes Catholic Education was making and what impacts that would have on her as a teacher Angela commented on the report from Shaddock, MacDonald, Hook, Giorcelli, and Arthur-Kelly (2009), which reviewed special education in the Australian Capital Territory, and commented on a number of proposed changes to funding allocations in the Catholic Education system:

> *Well it follows that big report from Shaddock I think about how schools get money for children with disabilities. Now the school is supposed to get money and decide how to spend it, not Michael coming with money attached to him. I haven't been told much about it yet, just that the IEP is probably going to stop as it is now.* (Interview 2)

This comment highlighted how systemic factors impact teacher's roles but teachers rarely are in a position of decision making around these new initiatives. In this case Angela's administration at the school had not informed her of the changes. She had heard there were some changes around but had not been informed how these would directly affect her. This placed Angela as a classroom teacher in a low position of power, having no influence and little understanding of policy that affected her daily working life.

Angela described being flexible with regards to her planning and the experiences she planned as an effective part of her teaching approach:

> *What I would say is be flexible because you might have set all this great stuff and its awesome but nothing none of it happens and sometimes he doesn't want to do it, refuses to do it, throws stuff and you try to persevere but sometimes you just go OK today we will do something else.* (Interview 1)

Angela identified Michael's behaviour as a response to not wanting to do specific activities. It may however be there were other reasons for his responses for example the task may be too challenging, or he did not understand the task, or perhaps that he was not motivated to do the task as he was feeling disengaged as a learner within the class. Angela's response suggested she positions Michael's disinterest and unwillingness to engage in learning as resulting from his individual issues. This situated the problem within Michael without considering other factors and influences such as socio-cultural factors and the learning environment (Macartney & Morton, 2013).

Angela described balancing the needs of Michael with the needs of the rest of the class:

> *His needs are not really anywhere near what we are doing in the day to day classroom, so as a teacher when you are planning for the rest of the class, you have that plan and sit down and think when the rest of the class is doing this, what is Michael going to do? We also make a lot of changes on the go.* (Interview 2)

Michael's plan within the classroom was highly individualised. Angela described trying to keep Michael working on a similar curriculum strand as the rest of her class in the sessions:

> *His plan is so different; I mean if we're doing maths we are attempting for him to do maths as well. So we focus on his colours and shapes and numbers, we were doing a lot of 1-5 at the start of the year; we've now increased it up to 1-10. I know his other school is doing 1-20 so we've started to do a little bit of that as well. In a sense if we are doing literacy, he is doing literacy, practicing writing his name and we are trying to do the letters.* (Interview 1)

Reflecting the highly individualised nature of Michael's learning was documentation used by Angela and Tammy to record Michael's learning throughout the day. Angela explains the system she used for Michael with regard to documentation which was shared with Michael's parents:

> *The template was passed up from previous teachers from Grade One or Grade Two and I decided that I liked that system. I found it quite simple and it shows what the rest of the children are doing, what Michael is doing and what kind of behaviours he is showing that day. I find it shows exactly where his learning is*

> *with his peers even though it is completely different. It is quite a simple format; you don't have to do too much thinking. It is harder for Tammy because she is the one who records all of the notes and finds time to fit them in the day and that is why during the day when he has had enough he might sit at the listening post and Tammy will write the notes.*(Interview 2)

Michael's program was individualised however, Angela related what Michael was doing against what the rest of the class was doing. The school officer recorded the information providing a window into the responsibility the school officer had for Michael's learning. Behaviour was again mentioned as a day to day focus for Angela.

This documentation was then used for assessment purposes:

> *In terms of assessment for Michael, it is not even close to what the other children do. Tammy writes down comments on every piece of work that he does. If he was obligant or happy to do it or didn't want to do it and it's all dated, there are records in a sense but it is all on an individual basis for him.* (Interview 2)
>
> This assessment did not appear to consider Michael's academic or social goals within the classroom. The assessment focused on Michael's demeanour throughout the day and how he approached learning activities.

When asked if she used any visual supports within the room and as part of her teaching approach Angela explained due to the vision impairment Michael had, visual supports had not been effective in her classroom:

> *In terms of visual supports he doesn't really relate to anything like that so much. Everyone always says make sure it is visual but he had his eyes operated on this year and put in new lenses, so it doesn't work for us.* (Interview 2)

Visual and textual prompts and strategies are identified as successful for learners with Down syndrome (Jones, Neil, & Feeley, 2014). Angela's comment highlights this is not the case for all learners with Down syndrome and learners will have their own specific learning profile. In this case Michael had very low vision so visual strategies were not effective.

Angela had adopted a similar approach to the teacher Michael had in the previous year. As a transition strategy when Michael was coming into Angela's classroom she visited the teacher and had discussions with the previous teacher.

Angela has identified this as an effective strategy and useful for her inclusion of Michael in her class.

> *I found it really useful going and seeing the previous teacher that he had as to how she planned his day. I have continued on with that same kind of setup.* (Interview 2)

The use of an iPad in the classroom was mentioned as an effective support for Michael's learning in the classroom. Through the school's budget an iPad was purchased for Michael's use, however his home iPad was used more due to its wider base of applications:

> *The school has purchased an iPad so he can use this but we don't need to use that one quite as much as Michael brings his own personal one from home which has a lot more stuff on it than the school one as the apps and stuff all cost money and the school doesn't always want to buy those things.* (Interview 2)

Angela mentioned being limited by systemic resource allocation with regards to the iPad. It could be seen she had found a way to overcome this with negotiating with Michael's parents about bringing in their iPad from home.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Perspectives of Diversity within Case Study Two

This theme considers perspectives of diversity within the context of case study two, and how it has presented in Angela's experience of supporting a child with Down syndrome in her class and school.

When asked about Michael's place within this school Angela describes his place as conditional and why this was so. She questioned the benefits to Michael of attending this school and whether his attendance at this school was in the best interests of Michael:

> *I guess in terms of school culture and inclusion, his place here is because the school has offered him a place because the parents are part of the wider parish community. As to how much he gets out of the community is the big question, he can't tell us and its one of those really tough things whether this is the right place for him next year or not.* (Interview 1)

Michael's conditional place at this school does not validate his right to be at school (United Nations, 1989). Rather Michael's place within the school was tenuous

and treated as virtuous by the school. This created a systemic barrier to inclusion for Michael and his family. Angela as a teacher was aware of this conditional placement. It was assumed as Michael has a different communication pattern to what was considered the norm that he was unable to express enjoyment at being at school. Despite questioning whether this placement was applicable for Michael, Angela did think having Michael in the school was beneficial for the other children in the school. She explained:

The benefits to Michael are questionable, but the benefit to the other children is important, seeing kids with disability in school is really important.(Interview 2)

Essentially Michael was not seen as a learner in this context, his place within the school was considered of some benefit for the other children in the school community, with no acknowledgement of the learning and social benefits to him. This position reinforces defunct, and historical thinking of children with Down syndrome as not being able to be educated in general education classrooms. Michael's inherent citizenship and his right to an inclusive educational experience are undermined by medical model, deficit views of diverse learners within this school (Kliewer, 1998).

Angela described her experiences of supporting a child with a disability. She believed an important consideration of working with children with various needs included building effective relationships with them. She described how she had facilitated the building of relationships in her classroom:

> *I really work hard with all my kids, I like to know about them, about their mums and dads, who their brothers and sisters are, what they did on the weekend because they will then know they can trust you. Then they are going to give you so much more.* (Interview 1)

Angela described value in building positive relationships in terms of how the children engaged with learning in her class. She described building a relationship with Michael in her classroom and how she understood this was an important element of her role in the classroom:

> *I have worked hard to build relationships up and I like to spend time with Michael, I really do like spending time with him. You'll often find me even though Tammy is there I will go and sit next to the verified kids because I like to be a part of them.*

> *Sometimes I find teachers don't always want those sort of kids, like Michael which is really sad and some people just don't have the patience, because you have to be very patient, very tolerant and also very fair. Most teachers will not want those sorts of kids when we are discussing where he is going to go next year.* (Interview 1)

Angela's language outlined how she positioned Michael from a medical model perspective (Oliver, 1996). She used labels such as the 'verified kids' and 'those sort of kids' to position children with disability as a homogenous group who were different from the other children in the group. Angela mentioned making an effort to sit with Michael despite Tammy being there which indicated that Angela felt mostly that Tammy was the one who was responsible for building a relationship with Michael and spending the most time with him.

Angela described other teachers not wanting to teach a child with a disability which suggested within her school culture she had been exposed to conversations about teachers not wanting a child with a disability in their class.

Angela further described her views on teaching children with special needs that included having high expectations for all learners and balancing those expectations with flexibility and a creative teaching approach. She explained further:

> *My view on any child who has special needs or verification is that you have high expectations of what they can and can't do and to have those high expectations and set those standards for them. The same as any kid, and that you have to think out of the box sometimes because one way for one child will not be the same for the other child and to be prepared. I suppose I didn't have much experience with children with Down syndrome; you learn as you go and work out what works for you.* (Interview 2)

Angela described the most challenging factor she experienced was negotiating Michael's behaviour:

> *Definitely the most challenging part is what to expect of the behaviour in class, and how to handle it is the most challenging parts of the day.* (Interview 2)

She described further:

> *Yeah, they're the challenging parts and you have to be prepared with kids like that at all times, you have to stick to your guns and stick to this is what I believe and this is what I feel is right and no they are not going to do what they want, this is what I want them to do. It's a hard one so as a teacher you have to have a fair bit of confidence in your own teaching and keep building that confidence*. (Interview 2)

As Angela had found it difficult to engage Michael in learning experiences it was possible this had further affected her feelings of efficacy (Bandura, 1977). She mentioned throughout the data collection that she found ways just to make it through the day. As she experienced challenging times where her value for control over Michael was challenged and she could not engage him as she would like, she was emotionally affected with her feelings of confidence and capability challenged.

Another challenging aspect of supporting Michael in her class was related to the time spent outside of the classroom necessitated by meetings and professional development. Angela described difficulties associated with having to be out of the classroom for various reasons while balancing the knowledge that she needs to be in the classroom:

> *There is a fair bit of time outside the classroom when you've got verified children which at the start of this year I was finding really, really hard because I've not just got it for Michael but I had it for another two/three/four/five other kids all year. Sometimes the more time you have outside your classroom the consistency just isn't there. So because you take on children with special needs and then all these different kinds of things, the more you are out of the room and at times you just want to be in your classroom with the kids.* (Interview 2)

Angela described a very large block of time in the first term where she was out of the classroom due to meetings and professional development. Although she identified this time out of the classroom as being difficult, she was also out of the classroom for personal reasons as well. The reason she identified for being out of the classroom for personal reasons proved crucial to her functioning within the classroom in a sustainable manner for the remainder of the year:

> *Probably the first term there was a big chunk I wasn't in the room, probably out of five weeks I was out for three of those weeks altogether which is a huge block of*

> *time. I had all sorts of meetings and people to see regarding the kids in my class and Michael. I had also been doing some spirituality retreat which is personal and that fell in the last lot of time being away. Thank gosh that happened because I just needed that so that I can function because I've just been so overwhelmed as I was going to meetings on Down syndrome, dyslexia, and this and that.* (Interview 1)

When Angela discussed Michael within her class, she did not refer to him as learner, rather she positioned Michael as belonging to a group of children who have official verifications in her class. Consequently, Michael's place within the class did not appear to be as a valued member of the class. Angela experienced many challenges which related to what she saw as Michael's challenging behaviour. She did not appear to consider the aetiology of Down syndrome when thinking about behavioural issues, rather equating the behaviour as Michael simply not wanting to do as she asks. As Angela positioned Michael from a deficit model perspective her sense of agency as a teacher was impacted as she became disempowered to try and overcome the perceived deficits she saw in Michael. She felt a loss in confidence as she became overwhelmed and focused on what Michael could not do in comparison to what he could do. Consequently Michael's sense of belonging as a learner was diminished.

This had further implications for the wider class community as they saw disability as deficits within the child, which undervalued the value of diversity within the classroom culture (MacArthur et al., 2012). As Angela positioned the children with official verifications together she was perpetuating a medical model of disability which saw diverse learners as defined as different within the class.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Collaboration

The importance of the collaborative relationship between Angela and Tammy was a recurring theme in case study two. The following theme of collaboration is divided in two categories: within school collaboration and collaboration with external agencies.

Within School Collaboration

The first collaborative relationship explored was within the school and was that between Angela and Tammy, the school officer. Other collaborations evident in the data included collaboration with the learning support teacher and Angela, and finally

between Michael's parents and Angela. As mentioned in case study one these collaborations as they take part within the class context are identified as within school collaborations.

The School Officer - Tammy

Tammy worked full-time within the school as a school officer. In the Catholic system, school officers assist students on an individual or group basis in specific learning areas. Other aspects of a school officer's role is to assist with communication between students and teachers, provide basic physical and emotional care for students, participate in team meetings, and assist with physical requirements of students requiring special care including toileting (Archdiocese of Brisbane, Catholic Education Council, 2010).

Michael attended the school two days a week and Tammy specifically worked with Michael on the two days he was in Angela's classroom. Tammy had worked at this school for six years. The last two years she had been the school officer assigned to Michael when he was at the school. The four years prior to this she was a school officer assigned to other children within the school. On the days Michael does not attend, Tammy was assigned as a school officer to other children within the school. Angela described part of Tammy's role:

> *The school officer is assigned to Michael all of the time, all of the time he is at the school, for toileting needs and all. Actually there is no toileting at all; he is in nappies so Tammy has to change them in the day.* (Interview 2)

Through observations on field visits it was noted that Tammy spent her time very closely monitoring Michael. She was rarely apart from him for long periods and ate her morning tea and lunch predominantly with Michael. This was reflected in the following field note:

> *It is almost morning tea time. Tammy is sitting at the back of the classroom with Michael and two other children. She is sitting at a desk next to Michael. Tammy has indicated to Michael that morning tea is very soon. The bell goes and Michael immediately gets up from his chair. Tammy grabs his hand and walks with him over to his bag. She takes out Michael's lunch and hands it to him. Michael takes the lunch. Tammy then walks with Michael over to the eating area and sits him down. She calls out to Angela to watch Michael for a moment while*

> *she goes back to assist the other two students she was sitting with prior to morning tea. She approaches the two other students and then walks with them up to where Michael is sitting with Angela watching. The other two children sit down near Michael. Tammy asks Angela to bring her morning tea down from the staff room when she comes down from getting her morning tea. Angela leaves for the staff room and returns with Tammy's morning tea. While Angela is gone Tammy stands at the back of Michael. Angela brings the morning tea down and gives it to Tammy. Tammy eats the morning tea whilst standing up behind Michael.* (Field note: November, 2012)

Tammy had spent time at the special school that Michael attended on the other three days he was not at school two. She had visited on three occasions to observe and talk with his teachers at the special school. She attended the meetings held at the school in case study two with the parents and learning support teacher. These meetings included individual education plan meetings and transition meetings.

Angela described a very positive working relationship with her school officer, Tammy and this was evident on the observation sessions within the class. As Angela had been a teacher for several years in a Prep context she described being comfortable working with other adults in her room:

> *Some teachers don't like having other people around when they are teaching or working and that is a challenge in itself but I don't find it hard, I mean I've got two or three people in my room every single day for Michael and for other kids in my class.*(Interview 1)

Angela mentioned in interviews on many occasions the need to support Tammy in her role of school officer. She links this with identifying that without a full-time aide Michael would not be able attend this school:

> *It definitely has been a massive support having a school officer with Michael., You couldn't probably have him in this school setting without the school officer support...because his needs are different, compared to every other child within the class. I say you need to support your school officer so that she knows that whatever she is doing is O.K. (Interview 2)*

Angela equated having Michael in the school with the necessity of having a full-time school officer. This had impacted her working relationship with the school

officer, placing a high level of value on the school officer as Angela saw the school officer as vital.

Angela described being an advocate for Tammy's working conditions:

> *Michael comes with the maximum amount of school officer time you know. I suppose the really important thing is for the school officer, is that they get the things they are owed and not have to seek them out themselves. Like the school officer is supposed to get a toileting allowance. Tammy has only got it this year but she's had him for two years prior. I make sure she is getting everything that is owed to her.* (Interview 1)

This focus on advocating for Tammy's working conditions stemmed from previous years Angela has observed Tammy in her role. Angela ensured the rosters and timetables were drawn up reflecting some time for Tammy away from Michael:

> *I saw from her past years the amount of pressure she has been on to look after Michael. He is very full on and you can't take your eyes off him for a moment. So I was conscious when I started this year that I really wanted to support Tammy. I made sure she got two breaks during the day for morning tea and lunch and that she goes on duty with him but the other duties are completely free of him. I have negotiated this with other teachers through admin and they do the rosters up that is taken into consideration because it is important. The classroom teacher and the school officer both need a bit of a break because it is full on.* (Interview 2)

When asked how Angela supported Tammy in her role other than engineering rosters and break times, she replied:

> *That's where I need to assist Tammy, when he is fighting or whatever it is, and is hard to handle, the teacher has to come in and step in and know we need to take it to another level and insist he is going to do what I want him to do. I won't let him put it over Tammy.* (Interview 2)

This response highlighted Angela's teacher directed approach where she identified herself as having full control within the class. While Tammy had the most responsibility in terms of spending time with Michael, Angela felt it necessary to enforce her expectations in terms of what Michael should be doing or how he behaved.

Angela identified a situation when Tammy was away from the school and the principal did not want to replace Tammy on that day. Angela believed it was not possible to have Michael in her class without the school officer being there. She described an example of this below:

> *Tammy usually takes him up just before morning tea or just after and then lunch time as well to the toilet. It would be very difficult if Tammy is away. For example, last week she was away and the principal asked if I could look after him for the day, and I said no you need to get someone here to help as there are 26 other children in the class as well, that need me just as much. He went away saying he would try and find someone and eventually someone did come. That day Michael had a huge toileting accident.* (Interview 2)

Angela alluded to wider systemic issues within the school culture where she was under supported by her school principal. The principal's comment displayed a limited understanding of how Angela was coping within the classroom, and how she would cope without the school officer to assist her.

As part of the school officer's role, Tammy had visited the special school where Michael attended on other days to offer some suggestions to effectively support him at the school. Angela's described this visit as being useful to Tammy in her role and to her as well:

> *Tammy had the opportunity to go for the morning period to the special school earlier this term to see how they do things and what they expect, and are we expecting enough from him, and she found that to be really useful. She was able to bring back some insights for me as to what she was seeing and how he is fitting into our classroom.* (Interview 2)

In terms of constructing the learning environment, Angela was cognisant of taking into consideration Tammy's role within the classroom:

> *When I think about setting up the classroom, I think about where Tammy will sit and be part of the class as well, she's just as important.* (Interview 2)

Angela described factoring in where Tammy the school officer would sit in her placement of desks within the classroom. Angela had devised a system of seating arrangements which grouped the children she had in her room who have verifications for hearing impairment and learning difficulties including Michael at the same desk

formation. She explained why she did this was to maximise the use of Tammy within the room:

> *I strategically place Michael within the classroom with one or two other verified children together which means Tammy can multitask and do a couple of things at once. I often keep him close by her I am probably a little bit to the back of the room and with a couple of free desks around him not so he is isolated but so there is a room for Tammy to sit.* (Interview 2)

This thinking about constructing the environment to reflect Tammy's needs was echoed by Angela's comments on consciously considering Tammy's needs at all times within the classroom:

> *You've got to be really open to your school officer, trust them; you know they're your lifeline when you've got someone like Michael because you rely on them so much. Your relationship with her is one of constantly thinking about how you are going to facilitate her and include her in the room.* (Interview 2)

There was evidence of Angela and Tammy working together to create a positive relationship. They successfully cultivated a relationship which was built of trust and respect for one another's role. Angela considered Tammy's role with high importance within her thinking about the learning environment. Angela advocated for Tammy in a professional sense, ensuring she was creating optimal working conditions for Tammy.

Angela described incorporating Tammy into planning for Michael from the beginning of the year:

> *At the start of the year we sat down and had a discussion about what kind of behaviour we were going to expect from Michael this year. In terms of work load we talked about how we wanted him to become a little bit more independent and ask for help more. We would sit down each week and sort of plan out what we are going to do on the Thursday and the Friday that he comes so that we are both on the same page or that if I am away Tammy knows what is going on.* (Interview 2)

Angela explained planning with Tammy was conducive to the development of a plan and goals for Michael. This collaborative planning time with Tammy was facilitated by a time table arrangement that saw them able to sit together and discuss

the planning within school hours. However, due to a timetable change these planning sessions had not since been possible. Angela attributed losing this programming time as impacting her feelings of preparedness in the classroom:

> *I used to have non-contact time and Tammy would be in my classroom we would actually sit down and plan Michael's timetable in the day before Michael would arrive on the Thursday so we both we on the same page. I found that to be really useful except for this term the time table has changed so I'm not kind of feeling I'm prepared.* (Interview 2)

When asked how she rectified this issue regarding the timetable change she replied:

> *No you do it in your own time, you fit it in. You have to be prepared and have resources ready to go and that time to do those things is not always given to school officers or teachers.* (Interview 2)

This collaborative relationship between Angela and Tammy was clearly a foundational element in Angela's experience of supporting Michael in her classroom. The following section focuses on the relationship between the learning support teacher, and their role in Angela's experience. When asked if there were visiting specialists teachers who had come to visit Angela this year Angela replied:

> *Not really, no I mean I know all of those people are there if I needed it but sometimes I just like to handle things myself.* (Interview 2)

Angela discussed there was a full-time learning support teacher at the school. Learning support teachers in Catholic Education schools coordinate and are involved in delivery of relevant programs on behalf of students with disabilities within the school. It is the role of the learning support teacher to support the classroom teacher and plan the individual education plan in consultation with parents, and other relevant stakeholders (Archdiocese of Brisbane, Catholic Education Council, 2010).When asked what role the learning support teacher took Angela described her role as mainly administrative:

> *It is just more when we meet for the individual education plan, she'll type up all the documents or notes from meetings but as a whole through Brisbane Catholic Education's directive now our learning support teachers aren't meant to be so*

much working with children. You know the whole Shaddock report thing. It's more the paperwork and making sure the teacher is supported. (Interview 2)

Angela elaborated by discussing how the learning support teacher would offer assistance when it was needed. She thought this approach was important to relieve pressure off the classroom teacher and the school officer:

Our learning support teacher is really good here and will kind of buck the system and will help and work with the kids. But because Michael has a full-time school officer there really isn't the need for that but she does take him for a duty so the class teacher is getting a rest, the school officer gets a rest. I think it's really, really important. When passing Michael on next year, I've already said I'm happy to take one of those duties because that is the support you need, you just need that time away, not just help with paperwork but help with time too. (Interview 2)

When asked what role the learning support teacher plays in the individual education plan Angela described the documentation of the education plan and accounting to Brisbane Catholic Education directives:

That's probably the learning support teacher's role, in terms of keeping the documentation of the education plan. The class teacher has a big part but the learning support teacher is the one in a sense who has to account to the special education consultant for Brisbane Cath Ed for our school and then she has to report that information back to whoever her boss is.(Interview 2)

Attending the individual education plan meetings was facilitated by the learning support teacher in collaboration with other stakeholders. Angela described who attended those meetings held within the school:

We have a consultant for special needs for Brisbane Catholic Education, our learning support teacher within the school. The teachers from his special school come along and this year we had one of the occupational therapists and a speech therapist come as well. Then the classroom teacher comes and sometimes the school officer comes. The parents come as well so it involves the whole team. The idea of this meeting is to set out some goals for the year together and talk about what both schools are expecting. (Interview 2)

The individual education plan meeting occurred twice a year. The second meeting in the latter part of the year facilitated discussion on transitioning Michael at

the end of the year to the following year. Angela had recently been discussing the transition arrangements for Michael for the end of the year with the learning support teacher:

> *I was just speaking with them the other day about where we think we should put him next year and what type of teacher will he suit. It wasn't a big meeting, just in passing with the learning support teacher. At present where they put him I don't feel it is the best decision but the other classes are all very weighted already, but I said maybe because if he is only comes one day he can maybe just slot in on top at the end rather than us just putting him in first in a sense.* (Interview 1)

Michael's individual learning needs were not identified as an overwhelming consideration in the transition process. Angela described not wanting to be part of the formal transition meeting that was to decide on arrangements for Michael's schooling the following year. She described why she made that decision below:

> *What happened was I had talked to the learning support teachers and discussed what was going to happen and I sort of put my opinions forward then. I then chose not to be a part of the next one with the parents and the school officer. I just decided I didn't want to be the one making any decisions for this little boy. I felt it wasn't my place that his parents and the school needed to decide what decisions needed to be made. It is not really my job to be working out whether or not he comes one or two days. I decided to pull back from that because I don't want to be deciding on a little boy's future and from a parent's perspective it's a really tough one as to what they do with him in the school.* (Interview 1)

In terms of her relationship with Michael's parents, Angela described a good relationship with them:

> *I have built up quite a good relationship with the parents this year. Michael's family has to be a bit understanding of our situation and have to be open.* (Interview 1)

The parents were clearly not in a position to challenge the school's handling of Michael's enrolment. The school had built up an educational placement for Michael which was conditional on how long the school felt they could manage Michael. This relationship had implications for how Angela worked with the parents, as she operated from an understanding that Michael's place was conditional and the parents

were accepting of this. This relationship was not characteristic of an authentic partnership as the parents held very little power in the relationship (Allen, 2007; Prezant & Marshak, 2006). Angela described Michael's parents as being very supportive of her as the teacher and flexible with her approach:

> *The parents are quite happy for me to do what I need to do with Michael. They have never come and said we don't want you to do that, they are quite happy, quite supportive and happy to go with what we are doing.* (Interview 2)

The relationship Angela had constructed with Michael's parents was one built on what she described as honesty and open communication. She described the relationship further:

> *I am quite open with them. If he has had a really bad day or he's had a really good day. I think that it is important to be completely honest and we are not doing anyone a favour by not telling the truth.* (Interview 2)

When asked if she had an example of this open communication with the parents, Angela relayed the following example:

> *Well, Tammy's dad actually passed away a little while ago so I e-mailed the parents and asked them would it be alright if Michael stayed home and not come to school today. The parents said no problems and she (the mother) made accommodations for that. I really don't like to ask him to stay home because he's entitled to be at school and it's his place to come each week, but it's a sports day and it's just too hard for him to be there.* (Interview 1)

This situation characterised the little power the parents held in this relationship. Wider systemic issues had created this relationship however, Angela as a teacher did not seek to disrupt the power imbalance. The relationship was not built on a positive attitude to diversity and contributed in further exclusion of Michael in the above example where he was kept home from school.

On several occasions Angela mentions she empathised with the parents about deciding on the optimum educational placement for Michael. Several times in the interviews Angela discussed talking with Michael's mother about his options for next year:

> *The parents really toy with what to do. We all had a meeting to decide what will happen in the next school year. She was toying with should Michael do two days or one day at our school or does he go back to the special school completely.* (Interview 2)

Angela's relationship with Michael's parents was built upon Angela's feelings of sympathy for the family. This construction of a relationship built on a deficit discourse created barriers to inclusive education within the school environment and did not challenge instances of exclusion of Michael (Saggers, Macartney, & Guerin, 2012). There was no real evidence of reciprocity involved in this relationship as Angela made requests of the parents with no real authentic input required from Michael's parents.

External Agencies

When discussing positive experiences that supported Michael in her classroom Angela mentioned several times the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland (DSAQ). Both Angela and Tammy had visited the Association's premises and Angela attended a professional development opportunity in the form of a two day conference. Angela explained how she used the resources from DSAQ:

> *The Down Syndrome Association is fantastic, you can go and borrow resources from there, and they are not too strict about the return, it is very close to us, so in school time we can duck down and get a few new things. The resources are fantastic and Michael loves what you bring back from there.* (Interview 2)

Attending a two day conference was identified by Angela as part of her professional development in the year:

> *It was interesting to go to the Down Syndrome Association conference earlier in the year and see all the different types of resources there. It was really interesting but I walked away and I know a number of other people were saying as well that the child in their class couldn't do anything like what they were saying. The staff presented cases of children who were at different stages but were all reading and writing, best cases, well Michael can't do that or anything like that and he may never do that.* (Interview 2)

Angela left this professional development opportunity questioning the relevance for her situation. It is possible worn down by her daily experiences she was

not in a position to feel empowered enough to enact some of the pedagogical approaches she was exposed to. Another reason for her feeling disenfranchised after this professional development may have been that in her current school climate the systemic support for her as a teacher was not there to facilitate her making changes to her practice.

She explained further thinking about what was presented at the conference:

> *I suppose they're showing this is potentially where they could go to in life but some of them many not always get there and they will always rely on their parents or like Michael is only eight now and he is sort of only at toddler stage. What progress will he make at 15 or 16, will he only be functioning at a five year old level? That's tough. But I did find the conference really good and in lots of ways helpful.* (Interview 2)

The way Angela conceptualised Michael as different to the other children impacted her ability to see Michael as a learner. She felt sorry for him and was concerned for what his future prospects would be.

When asked if the conference had any impact on her teaching approach Angela replied certain speakers had provided her with useful information:

> *There was a great speaker at the conference and I got a lot from him. He talked about how our expectations of behaviour have to take into account all aspects of the child like how they act and feel as well as their physical makeup. And not only that but how they feel can affect their thinking and learning. I think that is true of all kids.* (Interview 2)

Professional development presents teachers with opportunities for critical reflection on their own practices (Munro, 2012). Angela in this instance was able to begin to understand the implications of expectations and aetiology for children with Down syndrome, providing her with information she had not known.

An area Angela found useful was the discussion on working memory and the importance of re-teaching concepts:

> *I also learned that you have to have realistic expectations of Michael's working memory and take this into account. So I have to teach and re-teach stuff, which does become repetitive, but they told us that kids with Down syndrome can't*

always hold a lot of information in their memories. That was useful to know. (Interview 2)

Given that there had been challenges for Angela in terms of Michael's engagement with learning, learning about aetiology and the associated learning implications offered Angela a way to frame and reflect on Michael within her classroom.

This section has presented findings in the area of collaborative relationships, both within Angela's school and with external agencies. Case study two has presented contextual information of the school, teacher and child in case study two. Case study three is presented in the following section.

4.6 CASE STUDY THREE

4.6.1 Introduction

This section presents results from case study three and follows the format of case studies one and two with contextualisation of the case being given initially and following with a presentation of the findings. A description of the school and classroom context is given combined with descriptions of John the child with Down syndrome, and the classroom teacher Lisa. In addition a description of the special education teacher, Amy is provided. Early in the data collection the classroom teacher, Lisa requested Amy attend the research interviews with her as they worked closely together in the school. The presentation of findings for case study three encompasses both data from Lisa and Amy. Below is an excerpt from an e-mail from Lisa identifying initially that Amy wanted to be involved in this study:

I have spoken to Amy the SEP teacher and she is keen to be involved in our discussion. She has a lot to do with planning and supporting John in the classroom. We are both available to meet with you... (Document 1 November, 2012)

The following section begins with a description of the school in case study three.

4.6.2 Description of School Three

The school was a co-educational school located in suburban Brisbane. Students were enrolled from Prep to Year Seven. The school had approximately 900 students. This school began in 1985 as a multi-age school structure and still had the multi-age

structure operating at the time of data collection. The multi-age structure in this school meant each teaching team was made up of two classroom teachers operating within a dual teaching space. The children in any classroom may ranged in age from a 2 to 4 year age span, and usually stayed with the same teaching team for more than one year. Parents were encouraged within this school to identify the teacher and student match they felt was most suitable for their child. The school prospectus listed a strong tradition of multi-age education, positive relationships with stakeholders, innovative teaching methods based on the needs of children, and a supportive school environment as integral to their school context.

The grounds of the school occupied five terraces on steeply sloping grounds. The grounds were heavily populated with trees and native plants. Each classroom had an outdoor courtyard that teachers maximised for outdoor learning as well as being used for morning tea and lunch breaks. This school operated under the auspices of Education Queensland. A Special Education Program operated within the school. Special education programs and services support students with disabilities (Education Queensland, 2012).

Lisa described the school as having a strong focus on group work within the school:

> *Group work is an approach we use across the school. At this school you won't find desks all in a line and facing the board and children working in isolated situations. Our school for a long time has had a focus on group work.* (Interview 2)

Lisa described differentiation of the curriculum as an important aspect of this school's philosophy. A definition of differentiation from Chapter Two involves teachers thinking about different ways lessons or tasks can be presented that may meet the learners' needs in better ways. Differentiation also takes into account the students' level of abilities, their interests, and their learning styles (Tomlinson, 2003). Lisa described how she implemented differentiation:

> *Differentiation is a very high priority at this school. There is a priority of discussing differentiation and we have regular meetings with a coaching and mentoring team within the staff. In that time we look at our data and we talk about different target groups and what we are doing to support them so differentiation*

> *really is a whole school approach and I think because we are a multi-age school it is very much a priority.*(Interview 2)

This school embeds differentiating the curriculum as part of a whole school culture that identifies the importance of catering to students' needs. Lisa outlined differentiation as a whole school focus:

> *It is about the culture of the whole school and the expectation of the whole school, its knowing that there are support people that I can go to if I have a group of students that I am concerned about. I have someone I can go to and say I am really concerned about these students I don't feel I am doing the best for these students, what else do you think I can do?(*Interview 1)

There was a school-wide coaching and management program that operated within this school. Lisa described its function within the school:

> *We have a process in our school where we can go and watch another teacher work and someone else can come and watch me work if they have identified that you're doing something particularly well. It's called WOW-watching others work, and it works really well.* (Interview 1)

This program had been developed by the school principal in conjunction with other staff and when asked if the program was available to all the teachers Lisa described how it operated:

> *It has been formalised so there is no teacher who misses out. Every teacher in this school sits down with their coaches and their mentors and talks about their class. We have an opportunity to say who needs extra help in the classroom and it is all recorded so as a school they have every student identified who needs to be. For example, everyone who works in my classroom knows that John is here and knows what we are putting in place for him. We do it that way so as a school we ensure that we are looking at the individual needs of every student, and ensuring that we are providing the right environment, the right curriculum and the right pedagogy at the right pedagogy at times.*(Interview 2)

Amy adds to these comments by describing that the concept of differentiation extended in this school to the needs of the teachers as well:

> *In terms of differentiation, as teachers we are encouraged to self identify what we need assistance with in terms of our teaching and through that coaching and mentoring process we are certainly encouraged to access individualised support whether it is through WOW program or through outside professional development.*(Interview 2)

The classroom structure at the school used double teaching spaces and team teaching within all classrooms. This structure operated throughout the whole school. Lisa described how this structure impacted on her feelings about supporting John in her classroom:

> *All of our classrooms are double classrooms at this school and there is no such thing as teaching in isolation. I never feel like I am alone with John as every child belongs to the school community and it is a school response as to how you manage that child. We are encouraged to seek the help we need, not feel like you are in your classroom and you don't quite know what to do. We actively seek assistance and people don't look down on you if you do that in our school, we see that as being what a normal professional does, they seek help when you need it.* (Interview 2)

4.6.3 Description of the Classroom Context

Lisa, with her teaching partner, shared the double classroom teaching 49 students in a multi-age Prep/Year 1 class. The layout of the classroom incorporated a large double teaching space on one end, with a kitchen and storage room separating it from another double teaching space. Lisa explained the structure of the class:

> *We have a class of 49 students but we generally break that into around 25 students for each teacher for all teaching. That can be a combination of Prep and Year One and is probably for three or four of the literacy lessons out of five literacy lessons a week would be done that way and the same for maths. There are a couple of days where we split the children and get more specific teaching to match the skills to their ability level. When we have a whole class teaching component, that would last probably 20 minutes to half an hour on the carpet. Then 25 children would break off, sometimes I will break off students when I am teaching so once I feel they have enough information to begin working I might peel off that group and get them working on something and I will keep a group with me on the carpet to continue. The students always work in table groupings, generally I will have*

> *someone like Amy here to support John and the other SEP students so they would be sitting at a table with a group of students and whilst they will be supporting those SEP students they are also supporting the other students.* (Interview 1)

Amy added that group work was a strong focus within the classroom:

> *We always structure the groupings with a group of five or so because we understand that children learn with that social component as being really important.* (Interview 1)

Within the 49 children in the class there was John with Down syndrome, a child diagnosed with an Autistic Spectrum disorder, a child with significant hearing impairment and a child with a speech and language impairment. Lisa described some disadvantages and advantages to having a large class structure for John:

> *There are forty-nine children together so I guess the disadvantage is that sometimes that can be overwhelming for a student like John, he has adapted particularly well though. My teaching partner and I have what we call our home group so we take half the class so we know that we are generally the ones who communicate with those children's parents, we are responsible for those children's assessment and reporting, so we just take a stronger interest in their development. But we interact with all children in the class and the benefit is that we can have two teachers and we can at times really focus on children who need support and we can make that decision together.* (Interview 1)

Within her classroom context Lisa described three main classroom rules.

> *As a school and class we have three main rules and they are be safe, be respectful, and be a learner. In my class at the beginning of the year particularly I will focus a lot on what they are doing around those three rules. We talk about respect a lot and we talk about that in terms with our own behaviour management. I use the word respect a lot in the classroom and I do very deliberately introduce the concept at the beginning of the year, I even go so far as to do an explicit lesson on what respect means with role play and brain storming words that would show that we are being respectful and they would probably go away and draw them being respectful with another person. It is a classroom foundation but respect is important within the whole school as well.* (Interview 1)

4.6.4 Description of the Child—John

John was seven years old and was in Year One. John had Down syndrome and had been identified through a process of verification in Education Queensland as being intellectually impaired. This was John's second year at this school. It was also his second year being taught by Lisa in the same classroom as he attended the previous year as a Prep student.

John lived at home with his parents and grandparents. John's mother had English as a second language and it was his grandmother who came to the school for pickups and drop offs most days. John appeared very happy within the classroom. He had a friend who he spent a lot of time with in the day. They could be seen to have a reciprocal relationship. When moving around the school John would seek out this other child and they walked together, and chose to be together in play times as well. Throughout the day John interacted also with other children. At learning times within groups John and other children interacted, with other children asking how he was going and showed a great interest in his learning. At focused learning times John worked with a teacher aide. At these times he appeared focused and showed enjoyment in tasks. At times the teacher came over and provided positive reinforcement to John and he was visibly pleased, as were the other children learning alongside him. At whole group interactions John was encouraged to participate and he did so.

There had been challenging behaviour reported by the teacher and observed within the classroom and on the playground. John could be physical with the other children, pushing them and walking into them. At a class activity John was also observed not wanting to participate and refusing to do so. The teacher had also described what she referred to as non-compliance where John would refuse to do activities.

Lisa identified John was working at a Prep Year level, despite being in Year One. John enjoyed coming to school and had begun to make strong friendships with other children within the class. Lisa identified transitions from activity to activity as a time that John found challenging within the school day:

> *In terms of behaviour we are very lucky at carpet time he is very compliant and when he is doing his group work he is rarely resistant and he is normally*

> *compliant, his difficult times are transition so when we are transitioning from one activity to the next or we are transitioning from eating back in to the classroom it is difficult.* (Interview 1)

Amy discussed the necessity of building a relationship with John as integral to working with him in her classroom:

> *Often his first word is usually no and probably the first month I worked with him I was really developing that rapport as before then he would not do a thing I asked him. Sometimes when other staff comes he will not cooperate at all and we have put a lot of work into building a positive relationship with him. He is compliant but you do have to have a good relationship with him, otherwise he certainly will test you.* (Interview 1)

John was not toilet trained and needed assistance in that area. At morning tea time John was supported in the playground by staff and at the lunch break John would go to the special education room three times a week. The other days he was supported in the playground with staff members supervising. Lisa described the reasons for having support in the playground for John:

> *We have to support him at playtime as we don't feel quite safe enough for him to go outside into the playground with everyone else and I think he would love to but I think he would be probably be quite successful but we don't just yet. He has disappeared a couple of times, decided to go walk a bout and so we're not just 100% sure. I think my position in the playground is that he would be relatively safe but if he is up the top of the adventure playground he gets excited, and he has pushed people off. Also he is a relatively large boy in comparison to the other children. He has a spontaneous kind of action which is impulsive and he still uses non-verbal responses at times because he isn't very verbal. (Interview 1)*

When John entered the school he was using Makaton. Makaton is a form of sign language which is based on using hand signs and gestures for key words. John had been using Makaton prior to attending school to supplement his limited verbal language. When John began school he had limited verbal responses. In the classroom Lisa preferred to promote the use verbal language, however in the beginning of John's enrolment the use of key word signs were used sparingly.

4.6.5 The Classroom Teacher—Lisa

Lisa had been a teacher for approximately 22 years and had worked at this school for six years. She had not previously worked with a child with Down syndrome before working with John. Lisa had worked with children with intellectual impairment and many children with autistic spectrum disorder. Combined with this she had experience with working with children with learning difficulties. This year was her second year teaching John in her classroom as Lisa worked in a multi-age classroom with students in Prep and Year 1. John was in her Prep program last year and this year was in her class as a Year One student. Lisa identified the first year of supporting John in her classroom as challenging:

> *I know I did really struggle initially because I hadn't ever had a student with Down syndrome and it had been many years since I had an II (intellectual impairment) student as well*. (Interview 1)

When asked what particular areas she identified as challenging when supporting John in her class, Lisa replied:

> *I did flounder a bit with not knowing quite what to do. I think because we didn't have a document, a planning document, or a curriculum document to support us, it was very unhelpful. We had some staffing issues in the Special Education Program and we had many changes in staffing and I felt like I just didn't have a direction or didn't quite know what I was trying to achieve with John.* (Interview 1)

Lisa identified play-based learning as an important element of her teaching approach:

> *I really value play-based learning. I think it gives them a chance to get a little bit of down time where they do not have to feel like it is a really academic program. Every child gets to feel success with what they are doing and often we find this particularly with our Year Ones, their play is about what we have learnt that day anyway. However, our Preps as well, they use that time to practice what they learn so they are writing and they are even doing maths that we have been doing in class. They sit and play maths games and incorporate that into their play.* (Interview 2)

Lisa described how she conceptualised play as critical to her teaching approach and how that manifested in her classroom:

> *In regard to early years and play and the Australian Curriculum for me it is about having children playfully engaging with the curriculum. I have had to compromise in terms of not being able to teach using teachable moments as much as I used to, I am not able to go off on a tangent because the curriculum is quite rigid in my mind. I keep thinking about how I want the children to be playfully engaged with the curriculum instead.* (Interview 2)

Lisa had identified finding it challenging to continue a play-based approach to teaching in light of the introduction of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2013). The development of the Australian Curriculum has been guided by the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEECDYA, 2008), adopted by the Ministerial Council in December 2008 (ACARA, 2013). While the *Early Years Learning Framework* used in birth to five early childhood settings has more of a focus on play-based learning combined with intentional teaching, the Australian Curriculum is guided by a focus on general capabilities and content descriptors (ACARA, 2013; DEEWR, 2009). It was the focus on content delivery and not on play-based learning that Lisa was identifying as challenging to her teaching approach:

> *It has been really challenging over the last couple of years to continue a play-based program, certainly it is very, very difficult to run a negotiated play and learning program because our curriculum is so explicit now and non-negotiable because of the Australian Curriculum. I manage it through timetabling; I make sure that when I am teaching I am doing really focussed teaching and not just doing time filling activities. I ensure that when I am teaching it is really useful teaching so that I allow time at the end of the day for play.* (Interview 2)

She described using transition times and routine activities to do as much teaching as possible. Below was an example of how Lisa achieves this.

> *So for example we do a daily routine so on some days we will bring a clock in and discuss the concepts of time throughout our daily routine. So I can be teaching time through those kinds of routines and transitions and I don't then have to timetable a week's lessons on time. If I do it throughout the year that enables me to have most of the afternoons to have negotiated play happening where children can develop their own ideas and work on their own interests.* (Interview 2)

4.7 THEMES

4.7.1 Theme 1: The Classroom Teacher's Teaching Approach

When asked what changes, if any, Lisa made in her teaching approach while having John in her class she responded:

> *There are lots of changes. I guess firstly we try and offer as much additional support to him as we can as a school, particularly in our focused learning times and he does have additional support during that focused learning time. I also in those times ensure he is sitting close by so I can reword and clarify the tasks I am presenting for John. This helps with him understanding the process of what is happening and to keep him engaged in the learning process. I give John steps on how to participate in the whole group as a learner, so a lot of time is spent on learning behaviours in my classroom.* (Interview 1)

Lisa's teaching approach was based on modelling and scaffolding John's learning (Bruner, 1966). She described a focus on spending time developing learning behaviours within the class to support John's learning, which suggested Lisa operated within contemporary understandings of disability (Rietveld, 2005). Support for John's learning was given through human support at targeted learning times and through differentiation of the curriculum, which took into consideration John's skills, interests and individual learning needs in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2011). Lisa identified it was important to keep checking on John's engagement with tasks which suggested a high level of responsivity in her approach.

When asked to describe how Lisa encourages learning behaviours in her classroom, she replies:

> *I ensure John knows how to be a learner in my class. I encourage the support people to scaffold his learning but make sure he knows how to participate as a learner as well. So I teach him about whole body listening, how to put up your hand and things like that.* (Interview 1)

Lisa's focus on John as a learner had implications for her as a teacher as well. Positioning John as a learner identified Lisa understood John had an individual learning profile which she used to engage John in further learning. Using a competency based approach Lisa built on John's skills as a learner and increased the

participation he may have had in future learning tasks, thus providing impetus for future learning.

Lisa described this focus on learning behaviours as an explicit facet of her teaching approach:

> *I am very explicit about what I expect of students when I am sending them off to do work or I often talk about, what a good learner would look like right now, what would a good learner be doing, how can you show me that you are being a good learner. I use the WALT and the WILF concepts a lot, so at the beginning we will talk about what 'we are learning to', (WALT) and at the end 'what am I looking for ' (WILF). I find these strategies are useful with John.* (Interview 1)

The WALT and WILF acronyms were developed by Clarke (2004) as a way of identifying particular learning objectives clearly for children. WALT is an acronym for ‘we are learning to’, and WILF is an acronym for ‘what I am looking for’. Amy reinforced Lisa’s comments:

> *Lisa has a very clear focus on carpet behaviours and not just curriculum. Her focus is on making John into a learner, as well as all the other children*. (Interview 1)

The focus on carpet behaviours Lisa mentioned related to how John sat on the carpet and listened, how he attended to the teacher's instructions at group times, and how he participated in the group on the carpet. This explicit outlining of learning behaviours was encouraged in several ways by Lisa:

> *Definitely at the beginning of a lesson I talk with John and the other children about what we can do to be a better learner, for example we can sit and we can listen and have whole body listening. I very explicitly describe the kinds of behaviours I like, what does it look like, what does it sound like and I sometimes model the behaviours too. Also I use peer modelling, I often identify someone who is doing a great job and positively acknowledge that child very explicitly. Sometimes that person is John and he is certainly acknowledged for his learning behaviours.* (Interview 1)

As Lisa built John's capacities as a learner his sense of belonging in the classroom was reflected to other class members with a focus on respecting diversity and building citizenship within the classroom culture (Hartas, 2008). Combined with

the focus on the learning behaviours Lisa described other strategies she used for John in her classroom:

> *As well as a focus on learning behaviour we use a combination of both modifying the activity substantially and trying to provide support with that same activity but scaffolding it. John is a Year One student working at a Prep level so he is actually assessed in English, maths and science at a Prep level. With John because he is intellectually impaired it is about repeating instructions it's about ensuring he does have a clear understanding of what he has to do before he begins his task. Also it's about having him working in with a group of children so he can use other children as role models to help him.* (Interview 1)

Learning within groups had been observed in Lisa's classroom as an integral aspect of her teaching approach. When asked how the groups were organised within the class, Lisa replied:

> *We do group John with other students who are working at a similar ability level to him so that support can be shared amongst those students. That maximises special ed support as well, now we have three students with special needs in the class and one up the other end, so we pod those kids together to maximise special education support. (Interview 1)*

Lisa explained that within the learning groups the children usually would have a particular role to play:

> *I will send them off to do group work and provide a group leader for that work. The children will have a task they will have to work to complete together and John is always included in that as well. I have grouped him in a group with very capable Year One children so they are able to support him within that group, but he is always expected to participate in some way in that group activity. So we generally assign roles to different children within the group and John would definitely have a role within that group of something he needed to do. Generally I will sit with another group and move between the other students. This allows time to do more individualised work, particularly in science and SOSE* (studies of society and environment*).* (Interview 1)

Lisa's teaching approach included a focus on social participation which fostered John's relationships within the class (Koster, Naaken, Pijl, & van Houten,

2009). Through the use of learning groups a positive and interactive classroom community was encouraged. Students were given roles to play within the learning community including John, which showed Lisa valued his contribution in the class community. Lisa used her pedagogical knowledge to facilitate learning groups and act as a mediator of social participation within the classroom (Koster et al., 2009).

When asked to identify further strategies for working with John in the class Lisa identified the breaking down of tasks as a key aspect of her teaching approach:

> *Breaking down the steps of a task into manageable parts and giving John the beginning step of this task as well as being really clear about expectations is really important. He has good on task behaviours, I think because we have really focused on that. So usually we are on the same concept as the rest of the class but it may have to be a completely modified task. Particularly I am finding in science and those areas John doesn't have the conceptual understandings to really grasp what it is we are doing. So we will just take it back to a really basic level and work on a completely modified task step by step.* (Interview 1)

This was further evidence of Lisa's differentiated approach to planning for John as she modified the curriculum to cater for his own individual learning profile.

The use of visual supports, including the use of social stories, was identified by Lisa as being useful in her supporting of John within the classroom. Social stories are short stories which describe a situation, skill or concept usually with the use of visuals and limited text and incorporating relevant social cues, common responses and real life situations as a learning tool (Gray, 1991):

> *We have always put in visuals from the beginning of Prep with John, so any social issues or routines that John hasn't been sure of we have used visuals and social stories that are individualised for him and that has been really successful. We use the visuals to ensure his memory only has to remember one thing at a time and that learning is scaffolded with the use of visuals.* (Interview 1)

By targeting learning in this way Lisa was reinforcing a pedagogical approach which was based on responsivity (van Kraayenoord & Elkins, 2012). She was responsive to John's learning needs and adjusted his learning and her teaching practices accordingly.

Another strategy identified by Lisa as effective was what she terms the First/Then strategy:

> *If we need John to be transitioning to another activity we will often use a first/then strategy. We reinforce what John needs to do first, and then talk about what he needs to do next. It is a clear and simple way so he doesn't get overwhelmed. So we give him pre-warning like, we are going to this first, and then we are going to do that, and definitely praise and encouragement and positive reinforcement when he works well at the task.* (Interview 1)

The use of visuals and other strategies reinforced John's engagement with tasks. The use of small whiteboards and whiteboard pens were evident in the observation sessions within Lisa's classroom. Lisa explained how these whiteboards were used in her teaching:

> *I use whiteboards quite frequently, so I use them when we are sitting with John on the carpet or when an adult is sitting with him supporting him in his learning. If there has been something we have done on the carpet we then record it on the whiteboard, usually the most important part of the task. So the whiteboard is in front of him as a visual support and he doesn't have to remember all the information. It takes the load off his working memory. Also he is a concrete learner, so we cater for that style of learning by using the whiteboard. Maybe we will be able to withdraw those supports in time, but it is working really well now.* (Interview 1)

Lisa mentioned John was a concrete learner. She was building on areas of competence John had and displayed flexible and responsive classroom strategies to maximise John's engagement with learning. Lisa's responsive pedagogical approach was based on acknowledgment of various learning styles, was characterised by the confidence to try new approaches, and flexible teaching approaches to support diverse learners.

The use of an iPad was observed within the classroom. Lisa was originally bringing in her iPad for John to use; however, the school had recently received a government grant that provided a set of ten iPads to the school. Combined with the use of an iPad, Lisa mentioned the use of computers and the interactive whiteboard as successful strategies with John:

> *He is really keen on computers so we use computer technology whenever we can as he really enjoys it. We also use the interactive whiteboard which is highly visible and engaging for him.* (Interview 1)

This comment suggested using John's interests as a basis for engagement was part of Lisa's teaching approach. Through the use of his interests as a basis for learning experiences, greater engagement may be achieved.

The use of support staff such as Amy was identified by Lisa as being a supporting factor to her experience with John in her class:

> *The fact that I have additional personnel to support me, like Amy, is absolutely wonderful and is part of providing the success that he has here. In terms of people, I think the other children in the class are a really important factor of success for John as well. I use modelling from the other children a lot, and that is a fairly strong motivator for John. He has been very good at following others, and learned a great deal about how to engage socially at school through observing others.* (Interview 1)

As Lisa was advocating positive social interactions within the class a sense of belonging for John was being fostered.

When asked if Lisa used any supports for promoting positive behaviours she explained:

> *That is more just a general philosophy across the classroom of using positive reinforcement as opposed to being negative. I don't send children to the office, I prefer to manage the behaviour within the classroom, and with John I certainly wouldn't bother with an office referral because he wouldn't understand. I don't like external reward systems so I don't use stickers or stamps. On some instances of a particular behaviour that we had to focus on in a short space of time I might use a smiley face to say we had a good first session, let's see if we will get three smiley faces for today. So I might use them in a really short term situation but I don't generally use them much. I prefer personal contact with John, physical proximity, making sure you are going down to their level and looking at him directly in the face. For me the greatest strategy in behaviour management is the relationship I have established with John, so that he has for respect for me and I have respect for him.* (Interview 1)

As part of Lisa's teaching approach she scheduled time each day for free play within the classroom. At times John was supported in his play by Amy and that time may be used to work on John's individual education plan goals:

> *We have indoor playtime most afternoons so it is self-selected activities. Amy might spend half that time supporting John in his play and learning and social actions and then she might withdraw him a little bit for IEP work, but still within the classroom. But we do try and maintain that play every day if we can because we really believe that it is important for our young children to practice what they have learnt in a less formal setting. I think play helps to develop social skills and problem solving and all those other lovely benefits from play. For John play has been really helpful because it takes a little bit of pressure off him constantly having to be working really hard to be achieving in a more academic way. Play offers a way to ensure we are not overstimulating John and lets him tune out a bit.* (Interview 1)

Lisa balanced learning tasks with opportunities to practice these skills. She recognised play was a way to build upon the teaching and learning that took place within the classroom (Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). Play was also used within this context as a social experience and identified Lisa's awareness of learning and teaching as encompassing a whole child approach (Petrie, 2005). At these times John experienced both self-directed and teacher-directed experiences. The facilitation of these skills enabled John to participate with other children in the class and school community in effective ways. These opportunities for positive peer interactions were facilitated by Lisa to increase John's feelings of social participation and belonging within the class (Koster et al., 2009).

Combined with a play-based teaching approach, Lisa identified the use of concrete materials as a successful strategy when supporting John in his learning:

> *I try to incorporate the use of concrete materials into much of what I do. I really understand that appropriate learning takes place for this age group through concrete materials as well as through play. I know it is about engagement of learners, certainly with John and the way I know how to do that best after years of experience is through concrete materials, hands on activities, role playing, and presenting material in various ways, drama and the arts. Even though it is becoming harder and harder to stick with those methods, especially for kids like*

> *John, with the new curriculum, I have to hold onto that thought of playfully engaging in the curriculum.* (Interview 1)

Lisa identified a systemic issue which was the implementation of a new curriculum which negatively impacted her practice. Whilst she experienced difficulty keeping a play-based teaching approach, she believed it was important to do so. This displayed a high level of efficacy as Lisa was confident in her approach, believing it was the most effective approach for young children (Bandura, 1977). Lisa identified her early childhood background as an important aspect of her teaching approach with John:

> *I feel my early childhood strategies really help me with my practices with John. (Interview 2)*

When asked to explain, Lisa elaborated:

> *I feel it is really important to have high expectations of appropriate behaviours and probably even more important than this is to be consistent with those expectations. In early childhood I think we really understand that all children are different. I have kind of grown up with the notion of multiple intelligences so I am always thinking, what kind of learner is this? Although this has changed a bit now as Hattie (referring to John Hattie, 2012) tells us that there is no such things as multiple intelligences, but I don't know if I believe in that anyway.* (Interview 2)

She continued:

> *In early childhood we know how to engage children and to present material differently or in a multi-sensory way so that helps a lot with John having that knowledge. I think I certainly am always trying to make sure that I am providing information in a variety of ways for those students that learn in a different way and particularly for those kids who struggle with and don't find learning easy.*(Interview 2)

On the subject of inclusive education, Lisa expressed the view that John was accepted as part of the class and the school:

> *He is very accepted, I would say on a philosophical level at this school that is the approach we take anyway. Inclusive education is very important. I think that inclusion is so important, I'm a big believer in it, obviously as long as you are*

> *supported by your school inclusion is really important, I also think that differentiation obviously is key.* (Interview 1)
>
> This view of inclusion included not removing John from the classroom for his learning.
>
> *I think we have worked really hard for inclusion to happen; we do a lot of inclusion whenever possible even when we withdraw John I rarely withdraw him to a separate room it is always in the room. We don't withdraw him to another room to work, he does his work in here, he is included in this class the kids know that when support comes it is for John and one or two others but he is always or 90% of the time he is in a group anyway so we are not just sitting here supporting one child, it is the group and that makes a huge difference. He is just accepted as part of the group.* (Interview 1)

Lisa described her view of children has been shaped by her previous experiences:

> *I know from examples of other staff that I know over the years that I have been a teacher, that you either view the child as a valued member of your classroom, or you view the child as a problem. I think some schools and teachers see the child as the problem, it does happen. If you view the child as a problem, it is insurmountable and you don't ever get over it, so I think you have to take it on that John is just another student with a different group of needs. All children have different needs.* (Interview 2)

Lisa explained that when teachers position children from a deficit point of view problems are attributed as residing within the individual child and subsequently are seen as difficult to overcome. Operating from a more contemporary understanding of diversity consistent with a social model approach Lisa could see that John was a competent learner in his own right. Lisa adjusted her teaching approach to reflect a focus on developing a positive and inclusive class community which offered authentic social relationships and increased John's inclusion within the class (Rietveld, 2008). Viewing children as valuable and as learners within the classroom was described further by Lisa:

> *When we look at John we are looking at a learner, we look at what he can do and focus on building from there. We don't think of John as having Down syndrome*

> *but we look at the whole child and think what does he need to be a successful learner, and how can we support him to do that?*(Interview 2)

When asked how Lisa facilitated the building up of John's profile as a learner, she replied:

> *Well you get other students like we have got one that has behaviour issues and you know he is just as significant and challenging to me as John is for another group of reasons. I have to put as much thought into how I am going to manage him and make him a successful learner in the same way I do for John. So I guess that gets back to differentiation as well. Every child needs their own goals to build their success as a learner. It might not be just academic goals, it might be social or behavioural goal or whatever reasons are giving him a bit of a barrier to learning. Our role is to find those barriers and work with the child to overcome them.* (Interview 2)

By building high expectations as a learner Lisa was communicating a message of value regarding John as a learner. She recognised there were barriers to learning which did not reside within the child but were systemic and environmental and set about intentionally removing those barriers to enhance John's inclusion (Rietveld, 2005). Lisa described providing a classroom setting that enabled John to feel successful was important in her teaching approach:

> *Providing an environment where John is having success during the day and not always engaged in academic work that challenges them is important. He needs time to play and have many opportunities to achieve and feel successful within himself. If children grow with self-esteem and as a learner, that is half your battle. John comes in the morning and he is happy and we work hard on making him feel a happy and successful learner and member of our class, and our school for that matter.* (Interview 2)

Lisa used her knowledge as a teacher to build John's sense of inclusion in her classroom. She did this through identifying the importance of John feeling valued and included and experiencing success throughout the day (Corbett & Norwich, 2005). Her knowledge of John as a learner and the relationship she had built with him was used to support John's participation within the classroom.

Lisa identified the most challenging factor she experienced when supporting John in her classroom was in the area of communication:

> *Oral communication most definitely is the biggest challenge. It is sad because that is the thing that is really holding him back, we get really excited about some of the gains he's made in his learning, but particularly in literacy there is a real limit to what he can achieve because his oral language is so low. He has just started to really enthusiastically try to communicate, but he is quite difficult to understand. You are really desperate to understand what he is saying but you can't. He has had this kind of burst recently of oral language but you really can't understand what he is saying. I think at the moment 50% of his IEP goals are oral language goals, so we still are trying to work on it.* (Interview 1)

Communication had been identified as a challenge for John and Lisa had identified this as an area for further development.

Another area identified as challenging revolved around toileting and self care issues:

> *Apart from the communication issues we still have toileting issues. In terms of self care and toileting he doesn't take himself regularly to the toilet and often has an accident but doesn't let us know. As well as this we have trouble with his eating times, as he won't sit and eat, he tries to run around in the playground. Routines like these are challenging, but we keep working on them and hope they will be better in the future.* (Interview 1)

4.7.2 Theme 2: Perspectives of Diversity within Case Study Three

In case study three the word differentiation was used consistently throughout the data collection. Her definition of differentiation was given below by Lisa:

> *Differentiation to me is just simply looking at every individual's learning requirements and ensuring that you are getting good data and information about each individual child, and you use that data to inform your teaching about where they need to be. So making sure you know where their prior knowledge is before you teaching new concepts, making sure then that after you have taught those concepts you have an understanding of whether they have achieved it or not, whether you need to do more work on that or move onto the next concept.*(Interview 1)

Differentiation was believed by Lisa to be foundational to her planning as the multi-age structure demanded this approach:

> *Because we are a multi-age school we are thinking about differentiation all the time anyway. You have to differentiate; it is about the whole child. Being in a multi-age classroom you need be differentiating although it is just the bare bones of what we do. So when we are thinking about students we are thinking about their ability, not which year level they are at and we cater as best we can. I cater to the needs of individual children whether they are John or anyone else. I certainly think that environment and school culture here is really beneficial for me in assisting me to differentiate and focus on the needs of my children as individuals.* (Interview 1)

Lisa alluded to the wider systemic culture which underpinned her inclusive values and encouraged her to think about each student as an individual with individual learning needs.

The following field note displayed how materials were presented in a variety of ways within a lesson in Lisa's class:

> *The children are sitting on the mat with the teacher out the front. John is sitting close to the front of the group with a small whiteboard. The teacher tells the children they are going to be working on the letter V. To begin the teacher writes V on her white board. She then writes it in the air with her finger and asks the children to stand up and write the letter V in the air with their finger. The teacher then asks the children what words begins with V. Children begin calling out. The teacher chooses the word van and writes van on the board. She then has the children role play driving in a van. The children sit down and she draws a van on the whiteboard. The teacher writes van again on the board under the picture and asks the children to write van in the air with her. The teacher then writes van on the whiteboard again and asks John to write the word van on his whiteboard. A child leans over and assists John to write van. When he has finished the teacher asks John to hold up his whiteboard. The word van is on the whiteboard. The teacher asks the rest of the class to give John a big clap. They continue with the lesson with four other words, violin, vase, volcano and Venus. Each time the teacher writes the word on the board,*

> *writes it in the air with her finger and draws the picture of the word on the whiteboard as well.* (Field note 3, November, 2012)

This field note illustrated how material was presented in various ways to facilitate children with different learning styles to access the curriculum. This approach validated all the children in the class as learners but recognised there was diversity within the learning styles. There was a culture of inclusion which was evident as each child's learning strengths and weaknesses were valued. This approach had implications for John as he was considered to be just another learner with diverse needs which saw him valued in a classroom where all members are valued.

Amy identified there were benefits to the multi-age structure, and the use of differentiation as a strategy within the classroom:

> *There are lots of benefits when it comes to differentiating, I think multi-age certainly allows for peer tutoring with the younger and older children. John if he continues in this room can next year take on a bit of a leadership role with some Preps and whichever areas he can...I think having the multi-age double classrooms helps you because you have that flexibility of groupings, sometimes it is multi-age, sometime it is ability groupings, so students in Year One can just quietly slip back to Prep curriculum and nobody really knows and there is no stigma.* (Interview 1)

The multi-age organisational structure offered John effective opportunities for success including building his leadership capacities, reducing stigma associated with curriculum choices, and the ability to work in social groupings. The culture of this school was to choose flexible structures which enhanced learning for students, even if they were not considered to be the norm in terms of organisational structures. Through the fostering of inclusive approaches a range of ways for John to be a successful learner were built upon. This increased his ability to actively engage with a learning community and build positive relationships.

When asked if there were any challenges associated with the multi-age approach Amy mentioned the following:

> *In some of the other classes which are double classrooms and they don't have the physical divide between rooms they can be quiet overstimulating and busy and challenging, but not so in our classroom.*(Interview 1)

When asked how Lisa incorporated differentiation into her planning she explained:

> *In my daily planning I would be thinking about various multi-age groupings with Prep and Year One. Other times we might take the Year Ones for some specific learning and the other teacher will take the Preps and at that stage the higher level Preps would work with the Year Ones. On my planning it would show me highlighting John's name and where they were working so I would just have any kind of modification I am making for the lesson written down. I don't always jot it down, sometimes it is just in my head but basically differentiating all of the time and thinking about how he will be successful at this activity. We are finding particularly that we can have him participate in English and Maths quite successfully with scaffolding. When it comes to things like Science or SOSE where it is really conceptual understandings involved and it is difficult for John to understand I will completely modify the task but it will still be around the same concept.* (Interview 1)

Lisa's planning approach was based on the premise that John was a learner within the class. She was certain he could learn and as a teacher maximised opportunities for his learning through her planning. Lisa explained her timetabling showed evidence of her catering to individual needs and her thinking around differentiation.

> *The timetable will give evidence of your differentiation and that timetable is much as probably C2C doesn't like it ours becomes flexible so we might say this is not working we need more time, something is not working here so we will change our timetable. Sometimes it is frustrating for Amy as she has organised her support coming in at a certain time but we talk about it together and work through that. It is down to things like your organisation and time tabling which at the end of the day enables you to differentiate your teaching program.* (Interview 1)

The Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) mentioned by Lisa is the resources used by Education Queensland to support its schools with the implementation of the (DETE, 2013).When asked if this included making any curriculum adjustments Lisa described using the Maker model (1982). The tenets of the Maker model propose using differentiation across four primary areas. These areas include content, process, product, and learning environment. When differentiating in the area of *content* the information, including ideas and concepts can be differentiated based on the students'

needs (Maker, 1982). In the area of *process* differentiation can be achieved to help students' processing skills in meaningful ways including the use of various thinking models, changing the teaching approach and the way material is presented to students. Differentiating *product* can include an involvement of real world problems and realistic feedback. In the Maker model, the *learning environment* should be modified to ensure it caters for successful changes in content, process and product of curriculum and may include changes such as grouping children effectively, using indoor and outdoor spaces and creative use of learning spaces (Maker, 1982):

> *When we are thinking about curriculum and the adjustments Amy and I tend to use the Maker model and that looks at the adjustments necessary within the environment, curriculum, teaching pedagogy and culture. So it is looking at the whole environment, the curriculum is certainly a focus and more so than ever now and a significant part of that, but we really look at the whole picture.* (Interview 1)

Lisa identified some issues with curriculum documents that she found made it difficult to assess John's progress. When asked to clarify this Lisa added:

> *I think mentally a positive is that it makes you think positively about what he can do as opposed to what he can't do. I think curriculum documents need to narrow some of the tasks down to make them achievable. When you are looking at what they cannot do it becomes overwhelming, they cannot do this, what am I going to do? Whereas if you look at what they can do, you can then look at the next step and build from there.* (Interview 1)

4.7.3 Theme 3: Collaboration

There were a number of collaborative relationships which had been identified within the school in case study three. These included the partnership between Lisa and Amy, and collaboration between Lisa and John's grandparents. First, a description of Amy is given, as this collaboration with Lisa is highly visible in the data collection.

The Special Education Teacher—Amy

Because of the close collaboration with Lisa in supporting John's learning and because she was present at the interviews with Lisa, a profile of the special education teacher, Amy is provided here. Amy had been a teacher for 14 years. A special education teacher's role is described as a teacher with specialist knowledge and

skills, who supports the educational programs of students with a disability (DETE, 2013). Amy's teaching background included predominantly working in special education contexts including special schools. She had been working in this school for approximately two years in the special education program. Amy had experience working with students with Down syndrome in a special school context. She had not supported a student with Down syndrome in a mainstream context previous to working with John. Amy described her role within the school:

> *Basically with my special education support I am John's case manager. I look at collaborating with Lisa about the support John most needs. That includes playground, eating and playtime as well as focused learning times. I do individual education plans and he has four goals and that kind of underpins or goes across everything we are doing. I always know what I am doing when I come in to the class, having said that we have to be flexible at times as well.* (Interview 1)

When asked what role she played with regard to supporting Lisa as a class teacher Amy responded:

> *I think I really try to look at the teacher's needs and what supports they need. In the beginning a lot of time and effort went into looking at what does it mean having a child with intellectual impairment in the classroom and what is the best support I can offer Lisa.*(Interview 1)

Amy described how she and Lisa worked together to overcome issues:

> *I think collaboration for us and how we use it is all about problem solving too, if something doesn't work sometimes you will discuss it and come back with some ideas. We problem solve together and we will trial things and sometimes it doesn't work, and sometimes it does.* (Interview 1)

Amy and Lisa had a partnership built on mutual respect for one another's role. Amy identified her role was to support Lisa effectively within the class and together they worked on planning for John. Amy had attended professional development opportunities regarding Down syndrome and had found them beneficial. She described filtering information back to Lisa from these professional development opportunities:

> *I did go to a PD (professional development) on iPads and I have gone to the Down Syndrome Association conferences which are always good and I always share the*

> *information on a staff level at staff meetings and also one-on-one with Lisa so she gets the benefits as well.* (Interview 2)

Lisa had the benefit of Amy attending Down syndrome specific workshops which may explain how she understood planning for different elements of John's learning profile, such as impairments in working memory. Having that specific knowledge may have given Lisa valuable information in which she used for her planning for John.

Lisa described how collaboration was evident in her school:

> *I think that is something we are very successful at, we work collaboratively with each other, and we make sure that all of us understand what the expectations are around behaviour and that we are very consistent. We are very consistent with our expectations amongst the range of staff that work with John and we make those decisions fairly early in the year about expectations, and they might be related to IEP goals or not. We then discuss these expectations with everyone so that we are all working together.* (Interview 1)

There were consistent expectations amongst the staff who worked with John. Given there was a high level of support and collaboration in this school Lisa had the opportunity to discuss challenges and problem solve in a collective manner. Lisa identified the use of a collaborative planning approach had been a positive influence on her experience with John in her classroom:

> *Collaborative planning has positively impacted on our experience with John. Amy and I work particularly well together in terms of our philosophy and our collaborative approach. The fact that we communicate really quite regularly about John and what we are doing and what we might need to do and what is working and what isn't working, is beneficial. I think that fact of knowing you are in a supported environment means the collaboration is hugely beneficial to me as a teacher. So we all have the same approach, we are not relying too heavily on one or the other to really support John, I feel that it is a shared responsibility and I think the fact that I am in a multi-age classroom makes it easier as well. Collaboration is a feature of multi-age classrooms I think.* (Interview 1)

Lisa identified that although she was John's classroom teacher, she did not feel wholly responsible for him. This was characteristic of a supportive school culture who work together to create inclusive education opportunities.

Opportunities for discussions allowed the staff to understand the approaches taken and to further cement their commitment to inclusive education. Clarification of issues and problem solving opportunities in a responsive culture benefited Lisa as a classroom teacher and ensured she did not feel over burdened.

Lisa identified collaboration between the school and the child's family as being important. What form collaboration took in her school and classroom Lisa described below:

> *The parents are always key at our school in collaboration. Firstly we talk to the parents because at this school we have a history of parents being able to request classrooms and classroom teachers. So we talk to the parents to make sure we are all on the same page and we look at the children's needs together. Those good relationships with home are built over time; we really focus on that as a key part of our school here.* (Interview 1)

The collaborative relationships described with parents appeared to be built on authentic exchanges of information. Parents were asked to make meaningful contributions to the school to enhance the students' experience. The input of parents was valued with relationships being cultivated over time to ensure they were strong and effective.

Lisa identified John as living in an extended family and explained how that relationship had influenced her knowledge of John and his needs:

> *John lives in an extended family with his grandparents and his parents and his siblings. We have most contact with his grandmother and she has been very open in her communication, she will talk to us regularly and update us on the family and issues that might be influencing John's success at school. She's always offering to do anything she can to help in any way, and we encourage that too, so we have a fairly open relationship with her. John's mum's English isn't great so we don't communicate with mum very much at all, she comes in but it is mostly smiling and non-verbal communication, so she still feels welcome in our classroom. Dad comes in more regularly now and he's good with his*

> *communication as well, but grandma is probably the most we have spoken most to. John's grandma has given me lots of information from the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland, so I was able to do some reading about Down syndrome through their library which was helpful.* (Interview 1)

Lisa had built a relationship with John's family where she shared information which was useful for her in supporting John's learning needs. Lisa described initially needing more information on Down syndrome and requested professional development through her school:

> *Last year when I first had John and hadn't taught a Down syndrome child and hadn't taught a child with II (intellectual impairment) for many many years, I requested that as part of my professional development and got to go to an in-service. The in-service was on intellectual impairment and was really useful.* (Interview 2)

Lisa expressed some difficulty in accessing funding for professional development activities:

> *Our difficulty now is to get funding to go to anything outside of school; the next conference about Down syndrome is a two day conference so I think the school are actually going to say no. In terms of TRS (teacher relief staff) it costs $300 a day to replace a teacher.* (Interview 2)

Effective collaboration within this school was based on philosophical understandings of inclusive education and mutual respect for individual's roles within the school. The multi-age philosophy challenged normative constructions of how classrooms operated and had been described by Lisa as being effective in catering for diverse learners including John.

4.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented data from case studies one, two, and three. The data from the three cases have been organised into themes including the classroom teacher's teaching approach, perspectives of diversity within the three cases, and collaboration. These themes will be discussed in-depth in the following chapter. The discussion will focus on the various ways the teachers in this research view their students with Down syndrome, their teaching approaches, supports, professional development and inclusive education. The following discussion and conclusion

chapter, Chapter Five, discusses and draws conclusions from the findings from this research with relevant literature and theory.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This research was undertaken to understand the experiences of teachers working with children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. An identified aim was also to identify if there were differences in the way teachers conceptualised their students with Down syndrome as learners, and subsequently how these different understandings impacted their teaching approach. The research was underpinned by a constructivist-based premise that there are multiple realities inherent in how people view the world, providing individuals with varying understandings and perspectives.

Key findings of the research indicated that effective pedagogy for working with children who have Down syndrome included teachers conceptualising them as academic learners as well as social learners within the classroom. In this research the role of the teachers proved significant in facilitating the inclusion of the child with Down syndrome in the classroom and school environment. As such, the role of the teacher was discussed with regard to how they provided effective learning experiences for the child with Down syndrome in their early years classrooms. Both supporting and challenging factors experienced by teachers were also discussed. Following this, the research questions for this research are revisited. This final chapter also outlines the methodological contribution the research makes, and discusses the limitations of the research. Following this, the implications and recommendations for future research are outlined.

5.2 DISCUSSION

5.2.1 How Teachers Conceptualised Children with Down Syndrome as Learners within the Classroom

A key finding in this research was that different teachers view children with Down syndrome differently and these differing perspectives impact significantly on their teaching practices. Of particular importance in this research was the identification that the teacher's role is significant and inexorably linked to how the child with Down syndrome experiences inclusion (or exclusion) within the

classroom. Teachers in the current research appeared more effective when they framed the inclusion of the child within a lens of diversity and recognised the impact they had on children's experiences of inclusion. The two teachers in case studies one and three facilitated inclusion of the child with Down syndrome through conscious and consistent methods. These methods included increasing the child's belonging within the class through their pedagogical practices, understanding the diversity of needs the individual learners had, and through acknowledging the importance of social interactions and experiences within the classroom. The two teachers who appeared most effective did not conceptualise the child as potentially problematic, rather they set about teaching the child according to the child's individual learning needs. When these teachers saw the child as a learner, they were observed planning, setting goals, and implementing teaching strategies that further extended the child as a learner within the classroom. This conceptualisation of the child with Down syndrome as a learner had wider implications for the class as well, as the child was positioned as a contributing member of the class community and was viewed by the other children from a strength-based perspective.

The teacher who viewed the child with Down syndrome from a deficit approach positioned the child with the other children in the class who were also identified as having learning difficulties; this teacher also placed a greater reliance on support staff. The implications of this heavy reliance on support formed a barrier to the child's connection to the rest of the class and limited their opportunities for social interactions. The formation of a group of children or *verified kids* within the classroom in case study two positioned the children with various learning needs in a group which could be easily accessible by the school officer. These children were grouped together at learning times and at other times such as break times. The school officer's close proximity to this group of children created a barrier which hindered engagement with other children.

Historical constructions of disability where the deficit perspective is highlighted, have led to increased barriers for children in the schooling context, including being separated from their peers, being overly close to adult support, and seeing their removal from their peer groups (MacArthur et al., 2012). This can have wider implications for the child's friendships, and the way the child is viewed within the class and school community (Erwin & Guintini, 2000). The researcher of the

current study would agree with Paugh and Dudley-Marling (2011) that changing from a deficit view of disability to a social approach to disability, where interactions in a social context provide greater opportunities for children with Down syndrome to develop both academically and socially alongside their peers. This was apparent in case studies one and three.

How the teacher conceptualised the student as a learner and which pedagogical practices they implemented resulted in inclusionary or exclusionary practices. An example of this was observed in case study one where the teacher viewed the child as capable and requested that specialist teachers allow the child more time to achieve tasks without pre-emptive intervention. It was apparent that whether the teachers in this research viewed their students from a perspective of diversity, or from a deficit perspective, these perceptions directly influenced the child's inclusion or subsequent exclusion in the classroom. How the teachers conceptualised the child as a learner (or not) impacted the child's educational experience. The teachers' role in facilitating learning was a key influence in the child's schooling experience and is discussed further in the following section.

5.2.2 The Teacher's Role in Building Effective Learning Experiences for Children with Down Syndrome in the Early Years of Schooling

The teachers in case studies one and three were effective in conceptualising the child with Down syndrome as a learner within the class, and this was observed through their pedagogical approaches. This focus on building the child's profile as a learner did not organically happen, both in case studies one and three there was an explicit focus on building the child's capacities as a learner. The teachers in case studies one and three identified that the child needed explicit tools in learning to effectively learn within the classroom.

In case study one Melanie mentioned that she regarded the child with Down syndrome as competent and able to fulfil his role as a learner within the classroom. Melanie also identified that she used a concept she described as an expect, adjust and support model to her teaching. Initially Melanie’s expectation would assume the child could participate as she looked at the child as a competent learner. If the child could not engage effectively for some reason Melanie would adjust the task and put in support mechanisms to assist the child. This model was built on a foundational commitment to her philosophy that children are inherently capable, although diverse.

This approach to diversity of learners was also communicated verbally with the children in her class when she discussed the ways children's brains work differently. Normalising difference built classroom cohesion through respect, value and understanding of diversity within the classroom group. Melanie expected participation by the child with Down syndrome and was able to adjust her pedagogy to support the learner at whatever stage the child was at. This was in contrast to the teacher in case study two who took a more developmentalistic approach to her teaching and benchmarked the child with Down syndrome against how the other children were achieving.

The use of effective pedagogical practices in case studies one and three facilitated the inclusion of the child with Down syndrome. In case study one Melanie explicitly discussed catering for diverse learners and that all children were encouraged to be competent and independent learners. Melanie set out explicit learning goals and re-evaluated the goals when the learning concept was achieved. There was a high level of flexibility noted in Melanie's teaching practices which enabled her as a teacher to adapt the learning tasks as needed.

In case study one Melanie identified using the child with Down syndrome as a source of information about his learning and referred to getting to know him by talking and engaging with him. This was reflected in her discussions on building relationships with children as a foundational element to her pedagogy. Melanie did not undervalue the child's own contribution to their learning despite finding communication difficult. She sought opportunities for feedback from the child through observing the child and talking explicitly with the child. Melanie describes being watchful for when Liam begins to disengage from a task so she can redirect his learning and thus again increase his engagement in tasks. She identified looking for visual cues such as his attention turning to drawing on himself or engaging in other tasks not associated with the activity, as cues to provide a different learning activity or a break from the task. In case study three Lisa described using free play as a way to reduce the cognitive load on the child and as a way to sustain engagement in learning tasks. The level of engagement of the child with Down syndrome was discussed by all of the teachers. When teachers were teaching using a responsive pedagogical approach which was built on developing a strong relationship with their student the student's engagement appeared higher. Identifying the student’s interest

in the learning task was considered to be central to engaging them in learning tasks. By focusing on the importance of their own role as a teacher in the engagement of the child and understanding the child's diverse learning profile, each teacher developed a more contemporary understanding about disability. Teaching and learning is contextualised so that teachers recognise that their role is to understand how the child experiences the learning environment, and how their own teaching approach impacts the child's learning and engagement, with the aim of enhancing children's learning (Rietveld, 2010). The teacher is aware of disability as being impacted by interactions and external factors and not merely locating deficit within the child.

The teachers in case studies one and three were sensitive to diversity and saw the learning goals of all the children in their class as a priority. Interestingly in case study two the teacher discussed feeling torn about how to balance the disparity between the learning needs of all the children in her class with the needs of the child with Down syndrome. When she discussed balancing the classes' learning needs she related this to external pressure from her principal and other parents in the group who expected the class as a whole to progress satisfactorily in their learning. As such, Angela's priority seemed to be on the rest of the class and she left the responsibility for teaching Michael with the school officer who sat with the child for learning. It is contended by the current researcher that in order to effectively include children with Down syndrome as learners, teachers need to have a strong priority on all learners as having diverse learning needs. Benchmarking the children against one another mitigates inclusion. Teachers who understand their key role and have a responsibility to all learners within the class understand that their pedagogical approach can lead to inclusive or exclusive outcomes (Alton-Lee, 2003; Rietveld, 2010). There needs to be a commitment by teachers and an emphasis on the learning needs of all children within a class. The inclusion of the child in case study two was thwarted by historical thinking about learning occurring at the standard, developmentally appropriate rates and inflexible thinking about diversity of learners by the teacher.

In case study three there was a high focus on developing learning capabilities within the child with Down syndrome. This was an intentional part of the teacher's philosophy which included creating effective learning processes with a focus on explicit pedagogies for developing learning. Like Melanie in case study one, Lisa

intentionally sought to build the learning capabilities of the child with Down syndrome and have them engaged with learning as a competent member of the class. There were a variety of pedagogical practices used by Lisa which facilitated this, including a focus on learning to learn behaviours, using a language of learning, presenting information in varying ways, heavily scaffolding tasks, and adopting focused learning times. In terms of the language of learning Lisa discussed with her class about whole body listening, what it looked like, what it felt like, and what it meant to be a learner. Lisa used peer modelling to effectively emphasise this to all the children in the class as she recognised that all the children were diverse learners. Lisa intentionally and explicitly taught the tools for learning she felt all children needed. Flexible groupings, multi-sensory activities, the use of visuals, hands on materials, engaging through play and the use of iPads were mentioned as successfully including the child with Down syndrome into learning. The teachers in case studies one and three wanted the child with Down syndrome to build a profile as a learner within the class and did this intentionally to provide impetus for their educational success throughout their schooling.

Across the cases it must be noted there was no recipe for how to teach a child with Down syndrome. As with all children, there was diversity among children with Down syndrome and diversity among their teachers and their teaching approaches. For example, in cases one and three the children were heavily supported with visual aids. However, the child in case study two had a significant visual impairment so the use of visuals was not successful. Understanding by teachers that they need to match their pedagogies to the child's needs can create effective learning opportunities (Alton-Lee, 2003). Thinking there is only one way to effectively teach children with Down syndrome limits teachers' teaching repertoires. Only by acknowledging that all learners are diverse, even those with the same diagnosed disability, and tailoring the pedagogical practices to this diversity creates effective learning experiences for children.

The ways the teachers took responsibility for the child with Down syndrome as a learner differed slightly in the cases. In case study one Melanie took a strong stance on having responsibility for the child's learning and she organised support to further empower the child's learning, not to set up dependence on support staff. In case study two support was used to remove responsibility from the teacher to the

school officer. The teacher identified wanting to spend more time with the child but could not as she felt she needed to focus on the other learners within the group who were achieving the expected targets for learning. In case study three the focus of support was to maximise learning and social interactions. The support was used at focused learning times to scaffold the child's learning, and to reflect and reinforce concepts learned.

Understanding the learning needs of children with Down syndrome is necessary to limit levels of low engagement in learning and to limit misinterpretations by teachers of challenging behaviour (Jones, Neil, & Feeley, 2014). Angela mentions challenging behaviour consistently in the data collection. However, it was possible that this challenging behaviour exhibited by Michael was in response to unrealistic expectations she placed on him. In case study three mention was made of activities being balanced to reduce cognitive load on the student and experiences designed to reinforce learning which suggested using an understanding of the implications of Down syndrome on learning to create successful experiences. Angela in case study two appears to relate issues with engagement with a behavioural response from Michael. Understanding the health and learning implications of Down syndrome and other associated issues such as fatigue, low muscle tone and hearing impairments may have assisted Angela to identify the complexity of issues related to factors affecting levels of engagement.

The relationships developed with the child with Down syndrome were identified by the teachers as guiding their pedagogy and practices. These relationships formed a key part of the teachers' strategies in engaging their students in learning. When the teacher viewed the student as a competent learner and set goals and expectations for their learning, an inherent value and respect for diversity was also communicated to the whole class community. Teachers who were highly responsive to the needs of the children in their classrooms deliberately created a climate in which the values of inclusive education were communicated to the whole class through the building of relationships (Erwin & Guintini, 2000). These relationships include being responsive to the child, and adopting a holistic approach to their teaching. This approach is consistent with contemporary early childhood sociocultural perspectives which view children's learning and development within a web of relationships and interactions (Edwards, 2009; Hartas, 2008) and were evident in the current research.

5.2.3 The Teacher's Role in Enhancing Social Relationships for Children with Down Syndrome in the Early Years of Schooling

When the teachers implemented a more socio-cultural perspective of the child's learning as connected to a web of interactions as part of the classroom (Edwards, 2009) the child was expected to participate within the class community. The importance of the child participating in the whole class community was a focus for the teachers in case studies one and three. Social groupings, such as working in small learning groups, were used as participatory measures to further empower the child's learning. While identified social skills do not always translate into solid friendships, social participation encouraged by the teachers was described as building the child's sense of belonging within the class. Learning environments which use pedagogical practices based on both social interactions and learning goals are inclusive of all students and have a focus on classroom cohesion (Alton-Lee, 2003).

Teachers in case studies one and three modelled respect for diversity and this respect for diversity was a foundational and supporting element of the teachers' pedagogy. The structure of the classroom and school group has the power to include and exclude, with the teacher providing a crucial pivot point from which to view children as diverse learners or from deficit and diagnosis labels (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). In this research when teachers positioned the child as a learner and a part of the social fabric of the classroom in an authentic way, the child was effectively included. This sense of belonging and membership modelled to the class community that diversity is valued and respected (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). It was noted in this research that the influence of the teacher’s approach was significant to the child's experience. The flow-on effects from the teachers' ideology and approach charted a course for the child's inclusion or subsequent exclusion from the classroom community and ultimately impacted on the child's identity as a learner, and feelings of classroom membership.

The principles of inclusion consider not only the child's academic development, but also the child's social development through continual interaction with the teacher and the other children in the class (Morton, Rietveld, Guerin, McIllroy, & Duke, 2012). In classrooms where this acknowledgment of social context and social development takes place and all members of the class are valued, inclusion is promoted through the de-emphasising of differences, and embracing of

interactions between all children as learners (Smith & Barr, 2008). In case study two, the teacher maximised support by grouping children with disability or learning difficulty together. This use of support staff extended to the break times as well, where the same children could be observed sitting together with the school officer standing near them. This support was given by the school officer; however, it was observed at break times that the school officer was standing very close to this group of children, and no other children approached this group of children. The school officer in case study two provided an example of how support can at times contribute to exclusionary outcomes.

Melanie, in case study one, mentioned that ensuring support staff were not hovering over children all the time was an important feature of how she uses support staff. This use of staff displayed an awareness of how support systems can be exclusionary for children and present barriers to inclusion (Erwin & Guintini, 2000). Support people in the room who are working very closely with a student can prevent the student working in groups with other children and interacting in the class, as the focus is on the one-on-one instruction. Other children are less likely to interact with the student when there are extra adults creating a barrier to that interaction. Melanie was aware these barriers may occur and she planned the use of support staff with the intention of minimising barriers. In case study three, reference was made to how the child was very rarely withdrawn from the classroom to work with support teachers and that the support teacher worked with the child within the class. The perception here by the teacher was that as long as the work was carried out within the classroom, inclusion was occurring.

5.2.4 Teachers' Responses to the Inclusion of Children with Down Syndrome in their Classrooms

The teachers' responses to including a child with Down syndrome manifested in various ways including their use of support services and personnel, their teaching practices, the building of feelings of increased belonging for the child, where the teachers located deficit and their response to problems encountered.

When teachers adopted full responsibility for the learning and inclusion of the child with Down syndrome into their classrooms the use of support services and personnel was designed to maximise inclusion. This could be seen in case study one with Melanie challenging withdrawal of the child when she did not feel it was

necessary. Melanie also sought to disrupt deficit thinking about inclusion within her school when she had discussions with other teachers regarding the child's future learning needs. In case study two the heavy use of support personnel mitigated inclusion. The positioning of desks within the classroom to encourage the school officer to sit with the child created a physical barrier for the child to access other children. Also in case study two the assigning of a red ribbon on the child's hat in break times highlighted difference in a demeaning way. Angela discussed having conversations with the other children in the class and *training* them to call out if the child with Down syndrome was seen running away. This worked against inclusion, highlighting difference in a negative way. The deficit in this case was located solely within the child and the problem of running away was remediated through the use of a red ribbon on their hat. A social approach to disability may have seen the teacher adopt a more environmental approach looking for external solutions to problem solve this issue (Ballard, 2012).

5.2.5 Implications for Teachers Teaching Children with Down Syndrome in the Early Years of Schooling

The teachers' experiences in this research provided illumination of the significance of their role in the effective inclusion of a child with Down syndrome into early years classrooms. In this research two teachers promoted belonging for the child with Down syndrome through their pedagogical practices and their views on diversity. Conversely, one teacher through her practices and teaching approach contributed to instances of exclusion. The dialogue teachers have with their classes and their role modelling provides other members of the class community with ideas about diversity and the value diversity is given in their contexts (Rietveld, 2005). Teachers who gave a voice to inclusion such as Melanie verbalising diversity as the norm, provided children with an increased sense of belonging and inclusion in the class context. Down syndrome is not something the child can change and locating deficit within the child creates a dysfunctional learning environment where the child is marginalised. However, such as in case study three the focus on creating competent learners builds a persona which is built upon the strengths of the child and their individual learning capacities. Teachers need to be aware that the way they position children with Down syndrome impacts on the child's right to an inclusive education (Rietveld, 2010). When teachers understand they have the ability to

challenge discourses of deficit thinking such as in the case of Melanie, they create opportunities for change within their schools. This challenging of deficit discourse ultimately creates further dialogue within school communities and opportunities for reflection.

Teachers taking responsibility for the child with Down syndrome and implementing effective inclusive pedagogies continually reduced barriers to learning. The teachers who implemented inclusive pedagogies based on a valuing of diversity of learners expanded their view of learning to encompass academic and social engagement, combined with an explicit teaching focus on learning to learn behaviours. A point of difference between case studies one and three and case study two was the way in which the teachers encountered challenges. In case studies one and three when challenges were encountered the measures taken by the teachers included reflecting on their own teaching approach and issues with context, and they did not isolate the issues to within the child. Further to this, the teachers collaborated with support staff, the principal, parents and other organisations to problem solve effective outcomes for the child. Conversely, in case study two the issues were related back to the child and talked about as if they were not able to be overcome as the challenge was too great to enable the child to reach the level of his age group. Subsequently, this creation of barriers to learning for children with Down syndrome which appear insurmountable had the potential to drastically reduce teacher efficacy, see the child excluded further, and in the case of case study two culminated in the parents at times being asked to keep the child at home.

5.3 CHALLENGING AND SUPPORTING FACTORS FOR TEACHERS

Support was discussed in a variety of contexts by the teachers, including staff support, structural supports, and pedagogical supports. The nature of support appeared to be heavily contextualised, and in different circumstances had both inclusive and exclusive influences on children within the class and school community. If the support used by the teacher was heavily driven by a deficit perspective, the support often tended to exclude the child, with the teacher relying heavily on support staff.

Issues relating to support did negatively impact on the teachers' experiences in this research. For example, instability around staffing with regards to specialist

teachers was identified as a difficulty in case study one. This example illuminated wider issues about the nature of support for teachers and what form support takes for classroom teachers. The move from a deficit medical model approach, where deficits are located within the child, has shifted to an acknowledgement that there are wider social, political and cultural factors in play that affect the child's learning experience within schools (Ashman & Elkins, 2012). Issues of support described by the teachers in the current research are discussed below.

5.3.1 Work Support: The Principal as a Source of Support

Findings related to resourcing teachers appropriately, and supporting them effectively, were significant in this study. It became apparent that the principal's role in providing effective leadership was very important to the teachers' experiences. When principals provided effective leadership and provided organisational conditions conducive to inclusive education, teachers were in turn better able to cope and felt more supported in their work. Organisational conditions including mentoring for teachers, opportunities to collaborate with peers and share experiences, a culture of inclusion within the school, and adequate professional development opportunities were conducive to supporting the teachers' experiences.

In case studies one and three there was a clear and intentional commitment to inclusive education. Prior to the enrolment of the child with Down syndrome the principal had conversations with the teacher about how the school was going to ensure the success of the experience for the child and the family. In school one there was a clear responsibility for all of the learners in the community. This commitment and responsibility for all learners communicated to the teacher that the school had a clear role and responsibility in enhancing the inclusive education experience for all children. The principal further demonstrated his support for the teacher by attending the previous school context that the child was in prior to enrolling within the school.

Research has described that, in schools where diversity is part of the norm, school communities tend to be more supportive, cohesive and effective as learning communities (Forlin, 2005; Turner & Waterhouse, 2003). Inclusive school communities are more likely to be built upon foundations of democratic citizenship where respect for diversity is the norm (MacArthur et al., 2012). This democratic citizenship can be achieved when teachers have a level of authentic input in their role

in the provision of inclusive education. Principals who lead their school communities with emphasis on a sustained commitment to action and engagement in the moral values of inclusive education create a climate conducive to inclusive education (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010).

In case study two, where Angela felt overwhelmed in her role as the classroom teacher, it was interesting to note there was not the same level of support from the principal of the school as in case studies one and three. For example, there was no unequivocal commitment to the enrolment of Michael within the school. This lack of commitment on Michael's enrolment suggested that the climate of the school manifested in the precariousness of the child's enrolment, and a commitment to inclusive education on a systemic level was not conveyed to the teachers. The principal suggested that Angela could manage her class on her own when the school officer was absent. This incident may imply that the principal did not fully appreciate the practicalities involved for teachers who have a student with Down syndrome in the class. An example of this was the toileting situation which would have meant that Angela had to leave the class to go to another part of the school where the toileting facilities were located, leaving the rest of the students in her class unattended during that time. Where Melanie and Lisa felt supported by the principal's involvement and leadership, Angela felt overwhelmed. Seemingly, the school leadership in case studies one and three had a deep commitment to the provisions of inclusive education and further built on the capacities of the teachers. In case study two where the leadership did not directly engage in fostering a sense of belonging for the child, the teacher felt many difficulties in her role as classroom teacher.

All three teachers in the research expressed not being well supported in terms of how much paperwork the government mandated they undertake with regards to inclusion of children with disabilities. This paperwork included accounting for changes the teachers were making in terms of their planning for the student with Down syndrome and the individual goals and plans which needed to be documented. There was a feeling that a lack of support in terms of the amount of paperwork, and a shortage of time to complete the paperwork, was undervaluing their other roles as teachers. Teachers remain at the bottom end of a hierarchical system that decides the level of resourcing and support they will obtain. More input from teachers on the type of resourcing and support which is relevant to them could result in the provision

of enhanced, more cohesive systems of support. There appears to be a disconnect between the support that teachers need, and the support that is provided, and this disconnect presented challenges to the teachers in this research.

5.3.2 Additional Sources of Support from Within the School Community

Several positive applications of support were mentioned by the teachers such as the use of human resources including parents, learning support staff and school officers. All participants identified the parents or grandparents of the child with Down syndrome as a positive support, and identified the maintenance of a good relationship with them was a key facet of their experience. In case study one, it was identified that the positive partnership with the parents assisted the student's learning and was a useful strategy for the teacher to use.

> *It helps us when mum comes in the afternoon and looks at the photos of what he has done and then validates his learning and also he can replicate what he has done last thing in the afternoon. And then mum is really keen to show dad and that empowers every kind of learning experience we have.* (Interview 2)

There is agreement that effective collaboration can lead to lasting and positive improvements in quality teaching and inclusion (Fullan, 2003; Shaddock et al., 2009). Melanie in case study one, played a large role in the facilitation of collaboration with Liam's mother through the establishment and maintenance of a relationship that was characterised by frequent and respectful interactions. Melanie described facilitating this relationship as contributing to *empowerment* of learning for Liam.

Another effective support to the teachers' practice was contact with other staff regarding the child's previous educational experiences. This contact included visiting the child's previous education context where an exchange of information as well as observation of the child within another context provided vital information for the teachers in this research. The visits and exchanges of information were viewed by all the participants as useful to building up knowledge of the child and identifying useful strategies for including the child within their classrooms. The researcher proposes that this early form of transitioning for both the student and the teacher is an integral part of determining later success of inclusion of the child. In the case of Melanie

where there was a protracted period of transition, Melanie appeared comfortable with including the child in her class. This period of transition included visits to the previous education context, discussions with the child's parents and visits by the child and parents to Melanie's classroom in the year prior to the child starting at the school.

5.3.3 Access to Informational Support

In order to enhance their teaching, the teachers in this research identified needing more information about Down syndrome and the implications of Down syndrome for learning. Teachers wanted to know about the health implications of Down syndrome, and how these health implications impacted the child's learning. Information on physiological characteristics was reported by the participants as conducive to assisting them in their holistic planning for the child with Down syndrome in their classroom. However, it was noted that challenging behaviours presented particularly in case study two were identified as stemming from the child's disinterest or lack of motivation in learning. This may have been as a result of the teacher being uninformed about the learning and health implications of Down syndrome and therefore unable to recognise other factors which may impact on learning and behaviour such as fatigue, low muscle tone, or hearing and visual impairments. In case study two, a more positive outcome may have been experienced by Angela if she had been given more information on which to base her assumptions about Michael's behaviour. She identified occasions where as a teacher she felt overwhelmed and experienced very low feelings of efficacy. Providing teachers with an understanding of the health implications and factors associated with learning and Down syndrome was identified as a factor which would have resulted in a more intentional approach to guiding teachers' planning decisions.

The information reported as useful by the participating teachers was obtained through contact with The Down Syndrome Association of Queensland Incorporated (DSAQ), via their professional development workshops for teachers. It is contended by the researcher, that specialist teachers such as Advisory Visiting Teachers could have a greater role in disseminating information to teachers about Down syndrome. At a systemic level, training for Advisory Visiting Teachers, and the resourcing of these specialist teachers could provide classroom teachers with a valuable link to information. Free information is accessible through DSAQ's website, however,

teachers were not aware of this information, so further links to this information could be provided on web pages for teachers in a more targeted approach. In practical terms this kind of information could be provided through the Education Queensland internet based portals for teachers. Another strategy could involve administration teams in schools cultivating deeper engagement with agencies such as DSAQ when working with a child with Down syndrome. This engagement could involve DSAQ representatives attending staff meetings at the school to provide relevant information. While it is important to remember that all children with Down syndrome are unique, the teachers in this study all felt they needed to know more about the health implications of Down syndrome and the subsequent implications for learning. The teachers in this study did not acquire this information in a timely manner, and in some cases did not receive this information at all.

5.3.4 Access to Timely Professional Development and Mentoring for Teachers

The importance of professional development opportunities was a recurrent theme in the current research. It was clear that access to adequate professional development enhanced the experiences of the teachers in this research. Previously, it has also been established that in the case of Down syndrome, including pre-service teachers in an in-service that provided information on Down syndrome, was effective in increasing positive attitudes about the inclusion of children with Down syndrome in education (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003). This research with pre-service teachers also showed a positive increase in attitudes towards people with disabilities in general (Campbell et al., 2003). Further research suggests that for the benefits of inclusion to be fully realised, teachers need to experience effective training over several phases including prior to the student beginning in the classroom (Stanovich & Jordan, 2004).

There have been calls in Australia for professional development to not only be provided for teachers in inclusive education, but that teachers should be financially supported for attending (Forlin, 2001). In the current research there were several issues identified with professional development, including the time spent out of classrooms for teachers, the costliness of professional development, the timeliness of professional development, and the relevance of the professional development for their experience. Mechanisms by which teachers were informed about professional

development opportunities appeared sporadic and not well targeted. Australian research undertaken with teachers who worked with children with disabilities, showed a clear preference for professional development which is both practical and relevant, and provided time for teachers to interact, network and share information amongst their colleagues (Shaddock et al., 2007). More professional development sessions run by teachers who have experience in working with children with Down syndrome could prove effective in addressing some of the issues identified, such as the relevance of the material presented at the conference. Professional development and timely information for teachers has the potential to affect the teachers' experiences when teaching a child with Down syndrome. For teachers who are experiencing difficulty adequate professional development and well-timed information creates enabling conditions for the teacher and the child, combined with dismantling of barriers to inclusion experienced by the teacher and the child.

In case study three, a model of mentoring was evident in the school which appeared to effectively contribute to teachers' experiences. Mentoring by experienced teachers, with the support of the principal of the school, is a highly effective and practical form of professional development, which provides benefits to both the classroom teacher, and the child with Down syndrome. For teachers to reduce feelings of isolation, opportunities for collaboration on a whole school level are needed (Forlin et al., 2008). In addition, it is suggested that practical applications of effective leadership shown by principals with regards to inclusive education, positively impacts teachers' implementation of effective teaching in their classrooms (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). This focus on effective leadership by principals was consistent with the findings of this research in case studies one and three.

5.4 EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Teachers are resourced in both Education Queensland and Brisbane Catholic Education on the basis of policies of categorising students into deficit medical model categories. These categories originate from the Education Adjustment Plan that provides six categories for students with disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Impairment, Physical Impairment, Speech-Language Impairment and Vision Impairment (DETE, 2013). The researcher would argue that when these categories are placed on children, immediately a barrier is formed for that child, as the child is viewed from a deficit approach. However, it is

important to acknowledge that verification is an important aspect of gaining financial support for students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The verification process does however have implications for teachers and how they conceptualise students with a disability in their class, as was evident in the current research.

All of the participants in this research first described how many students were in the class and then how many *verified kids* they had in their class. By categorising the students into categories, a cohesive 'one class' acceptance of diversity cannot be fully realised; instead the class is broken into categories of difference. This focus on difference is at odds with the focus on diversity in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2012) and the aims of the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEECDYA, 2008). How are teachers to envision inclusive education and practices in their classrooms if they are operating in a framework that systemically categorises students with regard to their differences? Intensive work needs to be carried out in this area of aligning education systems, policy, resourcing, and support models and the underpinning philosophical ideals these systems represent. Research exploring these areas would then offer understanding of how a cohesive system of support and resourcing to teachers commensurate with inclusive education ideals could be achieved.

It is evident that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to resourcing teachers is not an effective solution for including a child with Down syndrome into an early years classroom. However, how decisions are made to resource and support teachers within classrooms appear to directly relate to how the teacher operationalises inclusive education within their classrooms in these three cases. As an important stakeholder in inclusive education, teachers do need to have some input into the level of support they receive. When relating the issue of support to wider systemic issues, policies need to be reflective of the requirements of support for teachers, and leadership teams need to understand this requirement. If education policies continue to view models of support and resourcing from a purely deficit medical approach, this deficit model will be reflected within the models of support offered in classrooms as well. The findings of the current research have identified that teachers and school officers can, through a lack of targeted support, be left feeling overwhelmed and under resourced within their classrooms when working with students who have Down syndrome.

Australian research has identified that in schools where effective learning support teachers or experienced special education teachers collaborate with classroom teachers, a positive difference was made, and subsequently good outcomes for students with a disability were achieved (Shaddock et al., 2007). However, the teachers in the current research identified receiving very little targeted assistance in the first phase of their teaching of a student with Down syndrome, keeping in mind also that none of the participants in this study had any prior experience working with a child with Down syndrome.

What is clear in this research was that the teachers' role was critical to ensuring inclusive early years schooling experiences for children with Down syndrome. The school culture, leadership, engagement with parents and professional development all can positively impact on the teacher and subsequently the child, but it was the teacher who was critically important. The way the teacher engaged in inclusive pedagogies to support inclusion, placed value on diversity and explicitly communicated the value of diversity positively to the wider class was a key factor in how the children in the class experienced inclusion. Combined with this, the current researcher contends that it was essential that teachers engaged in collaborative problem solving which observed other external contributing factors, including their own teaching practices as influencing the outcomes of the child's learning experiences. This reflection on their own practice was essential rather than merely locating problems as deficits within the child needing to be fixed. This research has identified that the way the teacher operationalised working with children with Down syndrome was crucial to how the child will experience inclusion and belonging in the early years of school.

5.5 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research identified a gap in the literature related to understanding teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. It was established that the inclusion of children with disabilities and full participation in education is a world-wide goal (UNESCO), 1994) and resides in a rights based platform to inclusive education for all children. While there was some literature identified on children with Down syndrome and educational experiences (Wolpert, 2001), limited empirical research on teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in general education settings was identified. This gap

in the literature was addressed by this research. Informing the research was an overarching research question which was:

What are teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling (Years Prep-Three)?

This research has shown that the experiences of teachers teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling vary. Their experiences are mired within contextual factors which contribute to and impact upon their experiences. These contextual factors include the teachers' own conceptualisations of disability and subsequent teaching approach, their school wide context and availability of support, information and resources.

Two further research questions were identified at the commencement of the research and they included:

1). What factors support and challenge teachers' teaching approaches when working with a child with Down syndrome in their classroom?

2). In what ways do teachers teaching children with Down syndrome conceptualise their students as learners?

The teachers in this research experienced several supporting and challenging factors when teaching a child with Down syndrome in their classrooms. Just as the children with Down syndrome in this research were all unique with individual learning profiles, the teachers were also unique with unique experiences. It is not suggested in this research that there is a 'one-way' of teaching a child with Down syndrome. Rather in answering the research questions, illumination of teachers' experiences in contemporary classrooms are provided, identifying the complexity classroom teachers' face in finding the balance needed for including all the children in their class.

Supporting factors were identified on a number of levels including staffing support, pedagogical supports, and administrative support. In case study three a school environment including a multi-age philosophy and mentoring program was also identified as supportive. This whole school approach created a sense of community and belonging for the child with Down syndrome. The three teachers identified parents and families as a positive support to them in their role as teachers.

Challenging factors were identified by the teachers in this research as lack of effective leadership from the principal, instability around staffing of special education teachers, lack of information regarding Down syndrome, and issues related to professional development. Lack of value on teachers' time was raised as a challenge to teachers, as were practical issues such as toileting concerns. All three teachers identified challenges with communication experienced by the child with Down syndrome as significant to their experience. It was also identified that when teachers position children with Down syndrome from a deficit perspective, challenges to inclusion for the teacher and child are experienced as was the case in case study two.

The teachers in this research conceptualised the child with Down syndrome in their classroom in various ways. In case studies one and three there were similarities in the teachers' views on teaching a child with Down syndrome. These views framed the child as a diverse learner within the group and acknowledged both academic and social goals for the child. Building a community among the children in the classroom context was a goal for both of the teachers in case studies one and three. In case study two the child with Down syndrome was positioned from a deficit perspective and was observed to be part of a sub-group of children within the class who had learning difficulties. In case studies one and three the children with Down syndrome were positioned as learners, whereas in case study two the child was not referred to as a learner within the group. Rather the teacher in case study two questioned the benefit of the child being included within the school, but maintained his presence in the school was of wider benefit to the other children within the school.

5.6 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study has made a methodological contribution in the form of a mind mapping technique that aided in reflexivity of the research. Teachers in this research discussed their experiences of working with a child with Down syndrome in their classrooms in the early years of schooling. Given the focus on accessing the perceptions and experiences of the teachers was integral to the research, the use of a mind mapping technique is significant.

Researching material which is disclosed to researchers via the participants' own words and experiences involves the use of creative methodologies to effectively

build in levels of reflexivity within the design (Simons, 2009). With this in mind the adoption of a mind mapping technique to capture the experiences of teachers in this research represents a methodological contribution.

5.6.1 Mind Mapping Technique and Interview

The original purpose of mind mapping derives from attempts to build upon increasing memory retention and productivity (Buzan, 1976). However, mind mapping allows an open and free flowing format to capture thinking processes which makes the technique useful in examining teachers' experiences as told by them. The experiences of teachers are not necessarily linear by nature, they are affected, enhanced and individualised dependent on a number of factors including (but not limited to) emotions, levels of support, their sense of efficacy, and socio-cultural interactions and factors (Meier, 2007). Canvassing these complex experiences necessitates the use of a technique which can effectively capture the individual nature of their experiences. In this research the aim was to make implicit knowledge explicit through description and interpretation of the teachers' experiences. The further knowledge identified in the mind mapping interview added to the existing data of the interviews and allowed for connections to be identified and clarification of themes to be discussed. The application of the mind mapping technique was used to support the conventional semi-structured interviews and added to the participatory nature of the research.

Based on the work of Simons (2009) on 'respondent validation' which provides participants an opportunity to check the researcher's accuracy and interpretations, the current researcher developed a tool to facilitate this. A mind mapping technique was chosen as it was time effective and given that teachers have limited time, provided an excellent visual representation of the data collected. The mind maps were created in a basic template, and the researcher hand wrote the data onto each template. Given this research was about teachers' experiences, the creation of the mind map technique was a key facet in the provision of an active voice for the participants in sharing their experiences. The use of the mind mapping technique is believed to be unique in that it has never before been employed to track teachers' stories in relation to how they work with children who have Down syndrome.

The mind mapping technique used in the final interview provided teachers with the opportunity to reflect back on the research process and the data collected to ensure the interpretations of the researcher were closely aligned to the teachers' experiences. This technique ensured there was a high level of reflexivity in the research process.

5.7 TEACHERS' STORIES - "NO-ONE HAS EVER ASKED ME BEFORE"

Each of the teachers interviewed mentioned that they had never been asked before about their experiences as teachers. This research provided a forum for this to occur. During the data collection, all three teachers commented on the effectiveness of the research process for their own practice. Particularly during the mind mapping final interview, the participants mentioned that they had not previously received feedback on their teaching in such an informative way. This reflective process proved extremely useful for the teachers, as it provided a voice for teachers to comment on their experiences, and share the complexities of the work they do with children every day. Given teachers are on the front-line in inclusive education, it is vital that their experiences are documented, and shared to further inform teachers about working with children with Down syndrome.

Without stories of teachers' experiences being present in wider conversations related to systemic issues regarding inclusive education policy, those conversations cannot be authentic as they lack input from a key stakeholder in the process. If teachers' experiences are not shared, it is unlikely that there will be impetus for systematic change, and the status quo will remain. In this research the gamut of the experiences of the teachers was wide. One teacher described her experience as a *very positive experience* while one teacher described her experience as leaving her *being completely worn down*. Understanding why the teachers had the experiences they did and the contextual elements which contributed to those experiences are necessary to ensure the most effective educational experiences are available for children with Down syndrome. Education, in the context of children with Down syndrome, has been described as the mechanism by which a child is prepared for a high quality of life (Faragher & Clarke, 2014). To ensure this is the case, the experiences of teachers need to be known so support provisions can be accessed to ensure they are providing this transformative experience for children in the best way possible.

Providing teachers with a forum for voicing their experiences validates the wealth of information they have to share. Teachers are a valuable relatively untapped resource with regards to inclusive education. Their reflections and insights are significant in understanding how inclusive education is enacted within contemporary classrooms. Teacher voice in educational research needs to be given a stronger platform in order to understand their experiences more fully. The teachers in this research were surprised that they were asked about their experiences and observed that has not been part of their previous experience. Teachers should be asked about their experiences and their reflections and insights used to further discussions about education and in particular inclusive education.

Various manifestations of policy and legislative undertakings relating to inclusive education have been conceptualised and implemented on a national and international level since the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). These policies and legislation have resulted in inclusive education being an identified right for all children. However, without an understanding of teachers' experiences as told by them, how these policies and legislation affect teachers in their own schools and classrooms is not known directly. Documenting teachers' experiences through their own voices gives value and recognition to the persons directly involved in implementing inclusive education at the grass roots level - teachers.

5.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The intention of the research was to gather a deep contextual picture of teachers teaching children with Down syndrome in their early years classrooms. While this study has contributed to the research corpus of teachers' experiences in including a child with Down syndrome in Australia, there are some identified research limitations to be addressed.

This research reflected the experiences of three teachers and as such is not generalisable. The three teachers in this study were female, and worked within schools which were considered to be mid socio-economic schools. While a sample size of three is small, the richness of the data allowed for a detailed examination of each of their experiences and an aim of the research was to gain a deep contextual understanding of teachers' perspectives.

Given the voluntary nature of the teachers' participation in this study their experiences cannot be assumed to be typical of all teachers who have had a child with Down syndrome in their classrooms. In this study two of the three teachers had positive experiences, and it is contented that there are many teachers who would not cope as well with children with diverse learning needs. While Angela in case study two presented less than positive experiences she was still willing to have her views scrutinised by others. Again this may not be typical of other teachers.

There was significant difficulty in recruiting teachers to discuss their experiences in this research. Given the research was undertaken in the year that the Australian Curriculum was first implemented it may be noted that teachers were too busy to be involved in extra projects such as this one. Initially the researcher intended for more teachers to be included in this research, however it simply proved too difficult to recruit more teachers. One difficulty in recruiting the teachers was related to the principals' responses to participating in the research. Reasons such as teachers are too busy, we do not allow research in our school, and a general failure to respond to the researcher's requests contributed to the difficulty in recruiting teachers for the research. It was a requirement of this research that parents needed to give consent for the researcher to be in the class of their child with Down syndrome. Two teachers who wanted to participate in the research were told by the parents of the child in their class that they did not want to participate. Another response given by a Head of the Special School, which was on a primary school campus, was that they would only be involved if the special education teachers could participate as the mainstream teachers were not responsible for the student with Down syndrome. This response in itself proves an interesting insight into researching in the context of inclusive education.

The nature of this research relied on self-reported data from teachers. A limitation of this type of reliance on experiences as told by the participants is that they may be giving answers that they feel are correct, or answers which they feel have a high level of social desirability. Given that it is extremely important for teachers to have an active voice in inclusive education this is a challenge for researchers to overcome. Including attitudes, perceptions and experiences of participants can only be achieved through what the participants disclose to researchers. This presents limitations to researchers who are researching through the

use of self-report data. Given the importance of inclusive education at a policy and systemic level in education departments it must be observed as a limitation that the participants may be only reporting what they felt were the most desirable account of their experiences.

This research had an exclusive focus in the early years of schooling. There is evidence to suggest that as the schooling years go on, positive attitudes and views on the inclusion of children with Down syndrome reduce (Gilmore et al., 2003). Research has been undertaken in primary and secondary settings documenting the inclusion of children with Down syndrome. However, there was a significant gap in the literature identified which related to the early years of schooling and this was why this research focused here. The focus on the early years of schooling may be seen as limiting the scope of the research, and it is acknowledged that future work in the whole spectrum of schooling is needed.

5.9 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There was one comment from a teacher that has stayed with the researcher through this research:

> *The question is not is the child ready for Year One, but rather are we ready for him in Year One. The difference is, children are children; it is our job as a school to be prepared for them. What are we doing to make sure Year One is ready for the child?*

This quote embodies the essence of inclusive education. It is about dismantling barriers to education and critically thinking about our roles as teachers in inclusive education. Children come to school from diverse backgrounds and it is a teacher's role to embrace this diversity, to value this diversity, and to look at what can be done to ensure the provision of the most effective environment at a classroom and school level.

Throughout this research program it became clear that these teachers were genuinely surprised that a researcher would want to ask about their experiences. This led to a pondering on the value we place on teachers, and their experiences. Society is having a conversation about inclusion and diversity in education. This can be seen in the introduction of the language of diversity to the Australian Curriculum

Documents (ACARA, 2013). Teachers need to be part of this wider conversation, and their experiences need to be heard. This research has made a contribution in this area.

All the teachers in this study wanted the best outcomes for all of their students, although the teachers faced many difficulties in including a child with a disability in their classrooms. As a society it is critical that the work of teachers is acknowledged and valued. Teachers do feel the weight of expectation on them to be inclusive, however they do not always know how to operationalise this. This is also a reflection on society more broadly, where inclusiveness, acceptance and diversity are not universal. If teachers are to see diversity as a strength in their classrooms, then the society needs to value their work, and resource and support them appropriately. This support can come in the form of support from administration teams, more targeted information, professional development, and engaging teachers in conversations about what they need to do to enact inclusive education effectively. Engaging teachers in reflecting about their experiences is vital to disrupting historical conceptualisations of teaching and learning based on deficit models.

The need for research in the area of the effectiveness and delivery of professional development for teachers has been identified in this research. To effectively include children with Down syndrome into general education settings teachers need effective professional development opportunities. Teachers need to have an active voice in the development, and facilitation of professional development to ensure it is functional, relevant and carried out in effective ways. Instead of professional development being something that teachers attend, professional development needs to be designed by teachers, for teachers. Further to this, professional development needs to provide adequate time for illustrations of practice by teachers experienced in the field.

Combined with professional development, the issue of mentoring for teachers is an important area to address. In the case of Angela, in case study two, she is a teacher who is using the most effective ways she knows to include Michael in her class. However, she does not have the tools to execute this, and subsequently describes her experiences as *completely wearing her down*. A mentoring program such as observed in case study three, would have potentially created a different experience for Angela, and subsequently for Michael. This mentoring program in

case study three was about teachers mentoring other teachers, and operated on a school level. The program was identified by the participants as creating an environment conducive to supporting and informing teachers. It certainly appeared to assist teachers to differentiate their planning successfully. Teachers in this mentoring program were able to share their planning ideas, discuss feasibility and collaborate on planning ideas. One of the advantages of this program is that it is held within the school, and operationalised by the principal. This means that the teachers are assisted in the program on-site at their school, and within the school times, as their administration organises relief teachers to relieve them. Mentoring programs such as this one which are run within schools, or in small cluster groups with local schools have the potential to impact positively on teachers' experiences. Mentoring programs have been identified as impacting positively the enrichment of teachers and their teaching of children with special needs within their classrooms (Berzina, 2011; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000).

However, for these mentoring programs to occur, more work needs to be done in terms of leadership training for principals to implement these types of programs. Principals are a key factor in teachers' experiences, and as such need to be effectively resourced as well with training on how to effectively lead and mentor staff in the area of inclusive education. Further research is needed in understanding on a larger scale, what support principals provide already, and what they and their teachers, feel is needed to effectively support teachers working with diverse groups of students.

Inclusive education is about both the student and the teacher reaching their full potential. All the teachers were surprised by what the child with Down syndrome could achieve in their classroom. As the potential of the student became visible to the teacher, the teacher seemed to rise to this expectation. When the teacher conceptualises the student as capable, their role as the teacher is reinforced. If teachers view their student as not capable, this appears to diminish their role as a teacher, and they rely more heavily on support staff.

Effective teachers understand that schooling is not only about academic achievement, but is also about belonging. This belonging to a community in the classroom and in the wider school is extremely important. Effective teachers facilitate this sense of belonging, and seek to dismantle barriers they see as working against the child's belonging. As teachers do this, they model values of diversity to

the wider student population, that in turn can influence wider networks including parents and the general community. Teachers teach children much more than curriculum content, they in effect model humanity, and this should not be undervalued. As a society, we must value the work of teachers, and not place unrealistic expectations on them.

Several complexities impact on teachers which need to be considered. These include wider systemic issues, historical assumptions of disability, a lack of collaboration, and a lack of mentoring for teachers in this area. When teachers feel comfortable working with students from diverse backgrounds, and see diversity as a strength, their own feelings of self-efficacy will rise as well.

The teachers in this study have reinforced the researcher's belief that two of the most important features of teaching relate to that of relationships and engagement. All the teachers in this study worked hard at cultivating positive relationships with their students, which was central to the child's engagement with them in the classroom. The building and maintenance of relationships with students is a key part of facilitating a positive experience for children in the early years of schooling. These relationships teachers cultivate with students provide the platform for children with Down syndrome to engage in school effectively, and to in turn develop positive relationships with peers.

A key finding of this research was that the way teachers viewed the children with Down syndrome in their class contributed to their effectiveness as teachers and the child's inclusion (or exclusion). The way teachers conceptualise diversity is an area which could be further researched on a wider scale to elicit a fuller understanding of what models and philosophical assumptions contemporary teachers are working from. This is important as this information could be used to further inform teachers about their roles in effectively including children with disabilities into their classrooms. Opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own roles in future research would provide deeper understandings of the tenets of inclusive education.

In all three cases reference was made to how the role of the teacher has been impacted upon by the implementation of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2013). Further opportunities for research exist to capture an understanding of these changes in curriculum, and what this means for teachers working with students with a

disability. With the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2013) still in its infancy it is important to track how this new approach to working with diversity will affect how teachers implement pedagogy to support students, how the new policy will affect their self-efficacy in working with students who have Down syndrome, and how policy and teaching practice are aligned.

An opportunity for further research could be in exploring the renegotiation of roles within schools between special education teachers and general education teachers. In case study one it was seen that the teacher could negotiate these roles quite well, however with more children with disabilities attending general education classes, it is important to understand these relationships as one could expect that there will be more cases like those described in the current research occurring in classrooms throughout Australia. Greater insight into how teachers negotiate these relationships could be used to further inform teachers including children with disabilities in their classrooms on how to facilitate effective relationships with other personnel within the school context.

While this research focused on the early years of schooling, there is considerable scope to include the pre-school years and early intervention contexts in documenting teachers' experiences working with children with Down syndrome. Combined with this, further investigation into why seemingly positive attitudes to having children with Down syndrome in general education contexts in the early years of schooling wane as children get older and proceed through the schooling years would be beneficial.

To more fully explore the experiences of children with Down syndrome in schooling, perspectives of parents on their school experiences is needed. Documenting experiences from teachers and parents would add a further dimension to reporting on school experiences of children with Down syndrome. In addition to this a focus on transition from before school settings to school is an area worthy of further investigation. The teachers in this research alluded to these transitions as key to the child's success and their success as teachers, so further research into this area is warranted.

The richness of the data and diversity within the participants' responses will represent for some teachers an insight into their own experiences. There will be facets of this research which other teachers will be able to identify with, and which

will prompt reflection on their own teaching approach and experience. Therefore the findings of this research could be applicable to other contexts with a primary role of illuminating teachers' experience of teaching a child with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. The findings could also offer a platform with which to share the experiences of teachers and provide future discussions for how teachers conceptualise diverse learners within their classrooms, and the pivotal role of teachers in this. The perspectives of the teachers, and their experiences, offer a rich insight into issues of support for children with Down syndrome as well as philosophical views of the teachers involved. The relevance of this was that it provided stimulation and further thinking with regards to how schools can effectively incorporate children with disabilities into their contexts.

5.10 CONCLUSION

This research has sought to understand teachers' experiences of teaching children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. Using a collective case study design and a constructivist paradigm the experiences of teachers were analysed. A deeper understanding of what factors support and challenge teachers' work, and how teachers view children with Down syndrome in their classrooms has been given. Varying pictures have emerged from the three cases in regards to how the teachers see students with Down syndrome in their classrooms, how they cope with the inclusion of a child with Down syndrome, what professional development is useful, and the importance of collaboration and effective school leadership. The teachers' role in including children with Down syndrome was found to be significant to the child's experience of schooling in the early years. All three teachers in this research have described that having up-to-date information on Down syndrome would have assisted them to include the child with Down syndrome more effectively in their contexts. Issues of how this information was given to teachers was identified as an area of concern in this research.

All children with Down syndrome are individual learners and they and their families should be able to expect individual and rewarding educational experiences. It can be seen in this research that rewarding educational experiences are not always the norm for children with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. It is evidenced in this research that children with Down syndrome are not always conceptualised as learners within the school context. Further work needs to be done

to ensure that the educational right of all children as learners are fulfilled. The teachers in this research have honestly identified issues which are challenging when teaching a child with Down syndrome. However, the identification of these issues and the acknowledgment that sometimes there is a 'messiness' to inclusion is a step toward understanding and then finding solutions to issues. There is no prescription provided in this research to 'fix' the issues, rather the role of the research has been to illuminate and understand current teacher realities.

A methodological contribution of a mind mapping technique was developed in this research to address a need for high levels of reflexivity and the close alignment of the interpretation of the researcher with the participants' experience. This methodological tool proved significant in capturing the participants' experiences as closely as possible to their representation and makes a contribution to scholarship.

The issue of teacher voice in educational research has been raised in this research. Teachers are a vital resource in understanding contemporary education. Without their voice in research there are significant limitations placed on our understanding of inclusive education. Teachers' insights and reflections and the sharing of their experiences contributes to society's understanding of issues associated with education. There needs to be significant value placed on teachers' experiences as a potential untapped resource in inclusive education research.

This research has contributed to an understanding of teachers' experiences teaching a child with Down syndrome in Australian classrooms, and provides an evidence base for future work in this area. A deeper understanding of the supporting and challenging factors to teachers working with children with Down syndrome has been identified, combined with an understanding of how the teachers in this research conceptualised their students with Down syndrome. Engaging students with Down syndrome based on the individuality of their learning profiles has been regarded as positively impacting teachers' experiences. Further to this the teachers who adopted a strengths based approach to their teaching and positioned the child as a capable member of the class community appeared the most effective at including the child with Down syndrome into their classroom.

Given this research has focused on teachers' experiences it seems apt to finish this document with a teacher's words. Whilst the words may not be in the most politically correct formation of using people first language, the sentiment is clear. All

children with Down syndrome are individual, they are diverse learners who have individual learning needs. Teachers who understand this and position them as learners within their classroom community are more likely to contribute to optimal educational outcomes for children with Down syndrome.

> *I think that diversity is across all children and not just Down syndrome children, every child is unique and individual and capable. With Down syndrome children you expect they're all going to be different, there's no two of them the same, so you know I would expect that if I had two Down syndrome children in the class I would have to deal with them completely differently as well. I think that is my strongest message, that don't focus on the Down syndrome child as anything different from any other child really, but just adapt and change as their needs arise.* (Melanie, case study one).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

DSAQ Education Consultant Information Letter for QUT Research Project

Centre for Learning Innovation
Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove Q 4059

How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice

QUT Ethics Approval Number1200000297

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher:	Amanda McFadden, PhD student , Centre for Learning Innovation, QUT

To the Education Consultant
18 July

Dear Amanda,

I am writing to you to provide information regarding my research project entitled, How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice. This research project is part of my Doctoral research program at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). My supervisors for this project are from the School of Learning and Professional Studies and are Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane and Dr Donna Tangen.

The purpose of this project is to document teachers' experiences when working with students with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling (from prep – year 3). The project is not a critical examination of practice and pedagogy but a detailed exploration of teachers own experiences, perceptions and practice when working with students with Down syndrome. There is a lot of policy surrounding inclusive education however, this study is unique as its contribution lies in telling of teachers own experiences of working with students with Down syndrome. It also examines the sociocultural factors which support and challenge teachers' pedagogy and practice when working with students with Down syndrome. It is anticipated this research will be useful for current and future practitioners and in policy development.

As you have contact with teachers working with students with Down syndrome I am writing to you to assist with the identification of potential sites where the research could take place. The requirement is that there is a student with Down syndrome in the grades prep-year 3. There is no requirement for you to approach teachers yourself, just to provide details of sites which might be suitable. I will then make contact with the principal of the

school and provide additional information to them. If you feel you could assist with this, please contact me either via email or telephone on the details listed below.

The sites and teachers in these schools will be non-identifiable, meaning all comments and responses will be treated confidentially. The details including name and school will be confidential and a code assigned to protect participants' privacy. Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of Research Data Policy. The research is also subject to rigorous ethical clearance and the approved ethical clearance for this research project is **1200000297**.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal, your assistance would be very much appreciated. Please contact me if you have any future questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda McFadden – Researcher (PhD Candidate)
Centre for Learning Innovation
Queensland University of Technology
Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove
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Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane – principal Supervisor
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Appendix B

16 June, 2012

To the Principal

RE: **How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice**

I am writing to you to provide information regarding my research project entitled, How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice. This research project is part of my Doctoral research at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). My supervisors for this project are from the School of Learning and Professional Studies and are Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane and Dr Donna Tangen.

The purpose of this project is to document teachers' experiences when working with students with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling (prep – year 3). The project is not a critical examination of practice and pedagogy but a detailed exploration of teachers own experiences, perceptions and practice when working with students with Down syndrome. There is a lot of policy surrounding inclusive education however, this study is unique as its contribution lies in the telling of teachers own experiences of working with students with Down syndrome. It also examines the sociocultural factors which support and challenge teachers' pedagogy and practice when working with students with Down syndrome. It is anticipated this research will be useful for current and future practitioners and in the area of policy development.

Participation of one of the teachers in your school would involve 2 audio recorded interviews, 1 observation session in their class and observation of planning documents. The interviews will take place at mutually agreeable times on site at the school and will approximately take 20mins to 30 minutes. The type of questions asked will include for example: What factors challenge and support your pedagogy and practices when working with a student with Down syndrome and what assistance is available for you in your school to assist with the inclusion of a student with Down syndrome?

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially. Your details including name and school will be confidential and a code assigned to the participating teacher to protect their identity. Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of Research Data Policy.

Any information obtained in connection with this project that can identify you will remain confidential. It will only be disclosed with your permission, subject to legal requirements. It is planned to publically present and publish the results of this research, however information will only be provided in a form that does not identify the school or the teachers participating. The audio recorded interviews will be destroyed after the completion of the project and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

I have enclosed participant recruitment flyers which can be discussed with teachers in your school should you be willing to investigate participation in this study further.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal. Please contact me, or my supervisors, if you have any future questions. If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project, you can contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or

ethicscontact@qut.edu.au (QUT Ethics Approval Number 1200000297). A consent form is attached for you to complete, indicating your agreement.

Yours sincerely

Amanda McFadden – Researcher (PhD Candidate)
Centre for Learning Innovation – Queensland University of Technology
0414 558 761 a1.mcfadden@qut.edu.au

Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane – principal Supervisor
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Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice

QUT Ethics Approval Number 1200000297

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Amanda McFadden – PhD student
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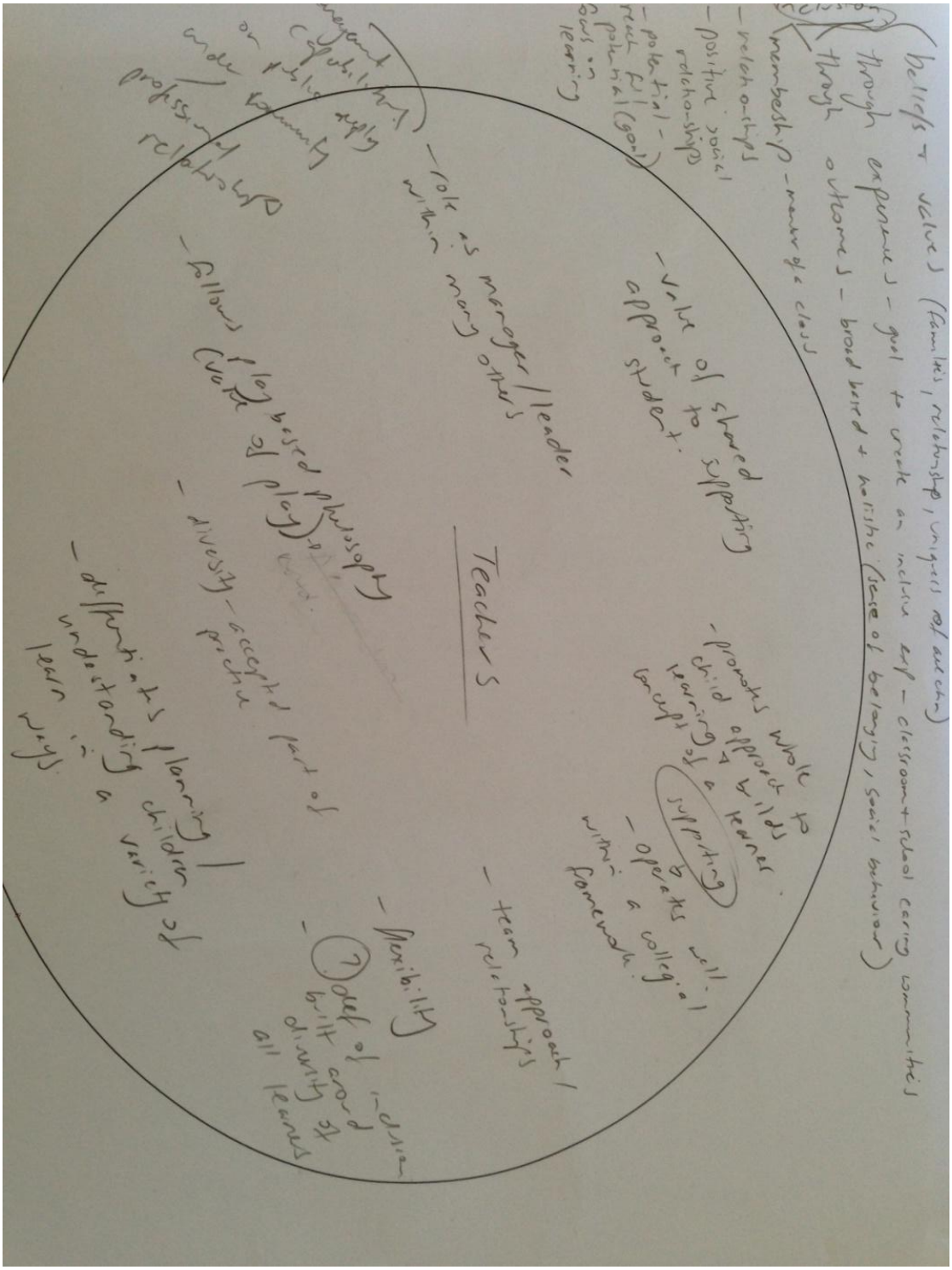
Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane – Principal Supervisor
School of Learning and Professional Studies
3138 8619 rs.spooner@qut.edu.au

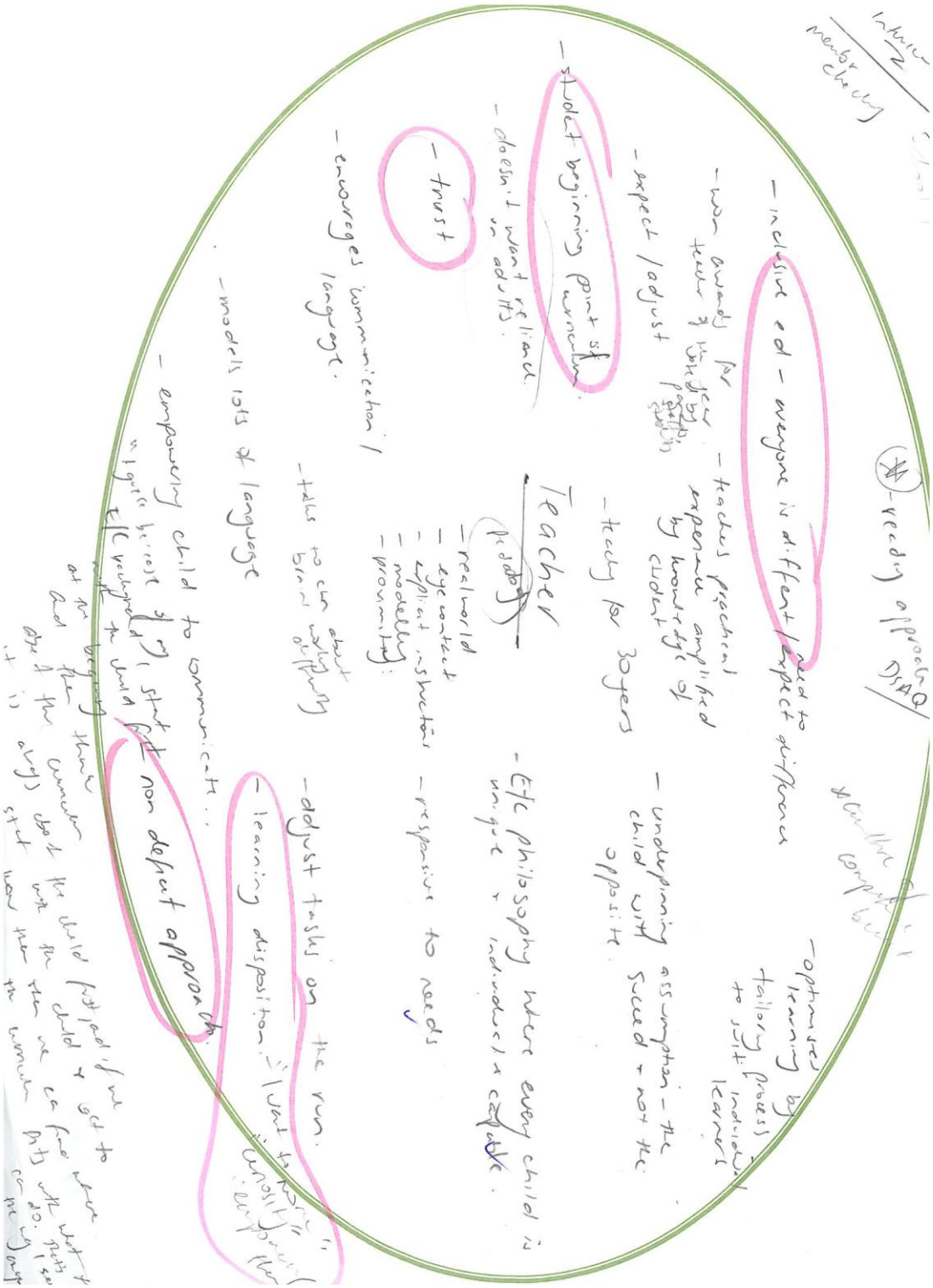
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

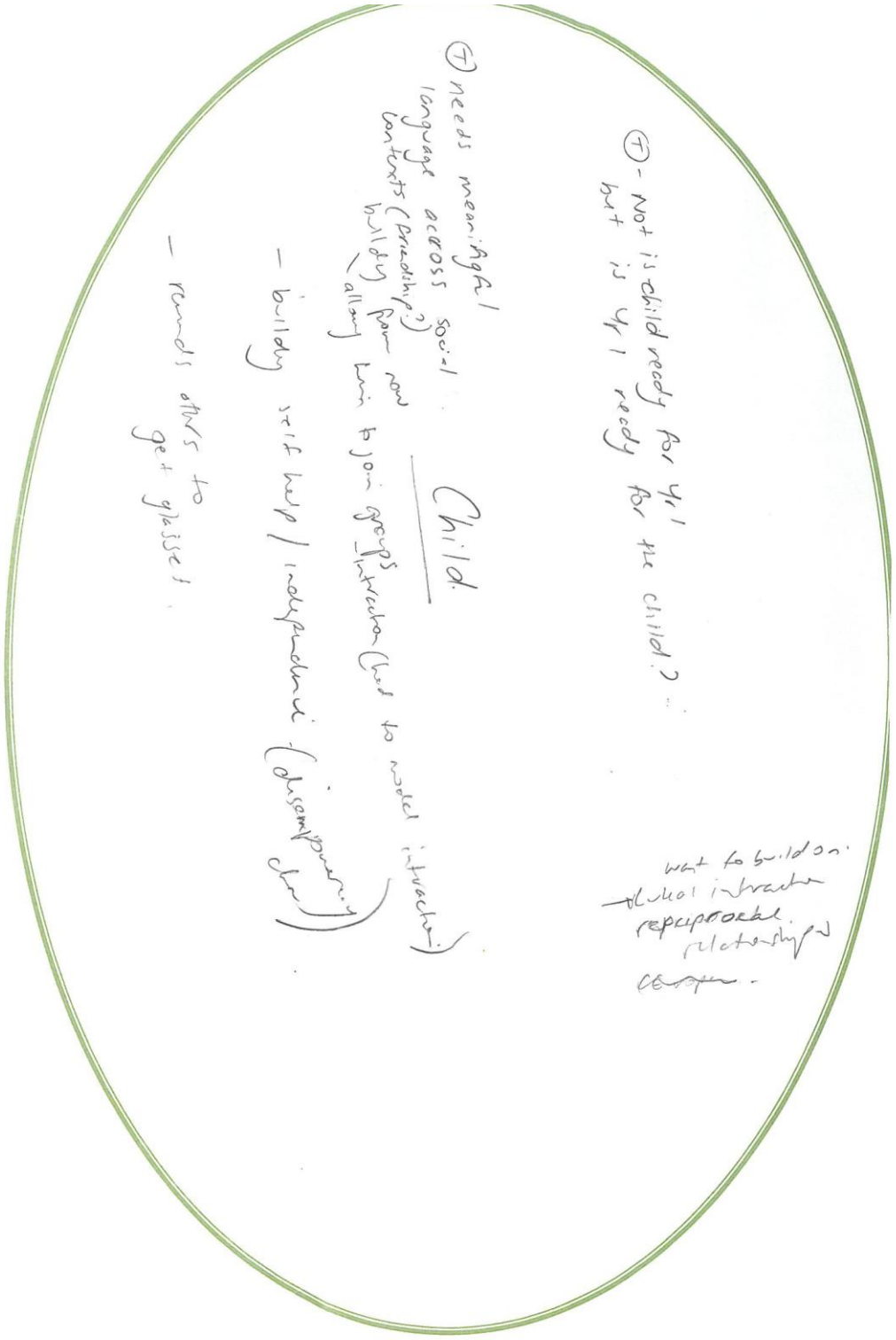
By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the project will include audio recording of interviews.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Appendix C




Teacher
- trust
- student beginning point of curriculum
- inclusive ed - everyone is different/equal to respect differences
- optimise learning by tailoring process to suit individual learners
- Etc philosophy where every child is unique & individual & capable
- learning disposition
- adjust tasks on the run.
- empowering child to communicate
- models lots of language
- encourages communication / language.
- real world
- eye contact
- explicit instructions
- modelling
- prompting
- responsive to needs
- understanding as symptom - the child with Ds not the opposite
- teacher for 30 years
- expect / adjust
- has already formed expectations by knowledge of student
- has already formed expectations
- doesn't want relationship as adults
- talks to ch about everyday things
- Needs approach
- Ds


T - Not is child ready for Yr 1 but is Yr 1 ready for the child?
T needs meaningful
language across social
contexts (Friendship?)
building form new
allowing him to join groups (Interaction (how to model interaction)
- building self help / independence (absent parenting)
- reminds others to
get glasses
Child.
want to build on
dyadic interaction
reciprocal
relationship

Appendix D

Classroom observation sheet

School code: **Date:** **Beginning time:**
Finish time: **Setting:**

Observation prompts	Observation and comments	Follow up themes
Teaching and learning context **Components of UDL** **Representation** • Customisation of materials e.g. extra lines for cutting, material presented visually • Other **Engagement** • Use of social configurations in learning (group work) • Strategies used to engage the student (e.g. music, movement, voice, props) • Other **Expression** • Uses of visual, auditory, technology • Other **Differentiated instruction** • Personalisation of learning goals • Use of whole group, individual, group and small group instruction • Use of hands on materials • Use of peer supports • Adjustment to tasks (e.g. Fine motor, gross motor activities, extra time) • Other		
Communication • Use of eye contact • Language modelling by teacher • Use of explicit instructions used by teacher • Verbal communication supported by body language – gestures • Other **Receptive (understanding and comprehension of language)** • Strategies for building receptive skills e.g. use of prompts, sequencing activities, activities to exercise memory, repeats instructions, use of visual supports		

• Other **Expressive (refers to spoken language skills and production of language)** • Teacher prompts student to elaborate / encourages speech • Informal conversations throughout the day • Strategies used to check for understanding • Other **Augmentative and alternative communication systems (AAC) (examples picture boards, signing, chat books, symbol boards, specialised software)** • Use of devices by teacher and student **Technology** • Used for communication • Used for learning experiences • Used for social interactions		
Social context • Encouragement to initiate play • Teaching of social skills /social skill programs • Teacher provides scaffolding of peer related interactions **Emotional context** • Teacher encourages children to negotiate solutions to challenges • Self help – toileting/meals/routines • Encouragement of persistence		
Further comments		

Map of class layout:

Appendix E

University Human Research Ethics Committee

HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

NHMRC Registered Committee Number EC00171

Date of Issue: 30/7/12 (supersedes all previously issued certificates)

Dear Mrs Amanda Mcfadden

A UHREC should clearly communicate its decisions about a research proposal to the researcher and the final decision to approve or reject a proposal should be communicated to the researcher in writing. This Approval Certificate serves as your written notice that the proposal has met the requirements of the *National Statement on Research involving Human Participation* and has been approved on that basis. You are therefore authorised to commence activities as outlined in your proposal application, subject to any specific and standard conditions detailed in this document.

Within this Approval Certificate are:

* Project Details
* Participant Details
* Conditions of Approval (Specific and Standard)

Researchers should report to the UHREC, via the Research Ethics Coordinator, events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project, including, but not limited to:

(a) serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants; and
(b) proposed significant changes in the conduct, the participant profile or the risks of the proposed research.

Further information regarding your ongoing obligations regarding human based research can be found via the Research Ethics website http://www.research.qut.edu.au/ethics/ or by contacting the Research Ethics Coordinator on 07 3138 2091 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au

If any details within this Approval Certificate are incorrect please advise the Research Ethics Unit within 10 days of receipt of this certificate.

Project Details

Category of Approval:	Human non-HREC		
Approved From:	31/05/2012	**Approved Until:**	31/05/2015 (subject to annual reports)
Approval Number:	1200000297		
Project Title:	How educators support students with Down Syndrome in the early years: Four case studies of practice		
Experiment Summary:	Explore teachers' experiences of supporting students with Down syndrome.		

Investigator Details

Chief Investigator: Mrs Amanda Mcfadden

Other Staff/Students:

Investigator Name	Type	Role
Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane	Internal	Supervisor
Dr Donna Tangen	Internal	Supervisor

Participant Details

Participants:
Approximately 4

Location/s of the Work:
QUT and Education Queensland

RM Report No. E801 Version 4

Page 1 of 2

Appendix F

A11.096 WB:cf ref:41

22 August 2012

Ms Amanda McFadden
260 Levitt Road
UPPER KEDRON QLD 4055

Dear Ms McFadden

The Brisbane Catholic Education Research Committee met on 20 August 2012 and considered your request to conduct the research project, *"How educators support students with Down syndrome in the early years: Four case studies of practice."* Approval was granted by the committee to contact principals of the schools nominated seeking their involvement in the project.

The committee has requested that if you intend on requesting access to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) of a student that you will advise of this in the parental consent form.

Please note that participation in your project is at the discretion of the principal. Should the school you have nominated not wish to participate, please advise the names of any replacement schools that you wish to approach before contacting them.

You will need to show this letter to the individual schools that you make contact with as evidence that you have the approval of this committee to proceed.

You are reminded that there is a requirement of all researchers to provide a full research report to this office when it is finalised.

If you have any further queries, please contact me on (07) 3033 7427.

Warren Bath
Professional Officer (Governance and Policy)
Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane

Copy: Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane
Dr Donna Tangen

Appendix G

Queensland Government

Department of
Education and Training

8 October 2012

Mrs Amanda McFadden
Queensland University of Technology
Victoria Park Road
KELVIN GROVE QLD 4059

Dear Mrs McFadden

Thank you for your application seeking approval to conduct research titled *How educators support students with Down Syndrome in the early years: Four case studies of practice* in Queensland State schools. I wish to advise that your application has been approved.

You may approach principals of the schools nominated in your application and invite them to participate in your research project. As detailed in the Department's research guidelines the following applies to the study:

- You need to obtain consent from the relevant principals before your research project can commence.
- Principals have the right to decline participation if they consider that the research will cause undue disruption to educational programs in their schools.
- Principals have the right to monitor any research activities conducted in their facilities and can withdraw their support at any time.

This approval has been granted on the basis of the information you have provided in your research proposal and is subject to the conditions detailed below.

- Perusal of and adherence to the Department's standard *Terms and Conditions of Approval to Conduct Research* in Departmental sites is required as outlined in the document at: http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/research/terms_conditions.pdf
- Any changes required by your institution's ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education, Training and Employment for consideration before you proceed.
- Any variations to the research proposal as originally submitted, including changes to data collection, additional research undertaken with the data, or publication based on the data beyond what is normally associated with academic studies, should be submitted to the research officer via email. Significant variations will require the submission of a new application.
- Papers and articles intended for publication that are based on data collected from Queensland state schools and/or Departmental sites should be provided to the Department for comment before release.
- Under no circumstances should any publications disclose the names of individuals or schools.

Education House
30 Mary Street Brisbane 4000
PO Box 15033 City East
Queensland 4002 Australia
Telephone 131 304
Website www.deta.qld.gov.au
ABN 76 337 613 647

- You are required to contact the Department if you are contacted by the media about research activities conducted on Departmental sites or if you intend to issue a media release about the study.
- At the conclusion of your study you are required to provide this Office and principals of participating schools with a summary of your research results and any associated published papers or materials in hard copy. You are also requested to submit the documents in electronic format, or provide a link to an online location if possible, to research.stratpol@dete.qld.gov.au. **Failure to provide a report on your research will preclude you from undertaking any future research in Queensland State schools.**

Please note that this letter constitutes approval to invite principals to participate in the research project as outlined in your research application. This approval does not constitute ethics approval or support for the general and commercial use of an intervention or curriculum program, software program or other enterprise that you may be evaluating as part of your research.

Strategic Research values your input into the research application process and is seeking your responses through the enclosed short feedback form. It is hoped that this feedback will enable Strategic Research to effectively assess whether its processes are efficiently streamlined, transparent and mutually beneficial to all stakeholders.

Should you require further information on the research application process, please feel free to contact Rebecca Libke, Senior Research Officer, Strategic Policy and Research on (07) 3237 0417. Please quote the file number 550/27/1257 in future correspondence.

I wish your study every success.

Yours sincerely

John F. Dungan

Dr John Dungan
Director
Research Services
Strategic Policy and Portfolio Relations
Trim ref: 12/363496

Appendix H

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice

QUT Ethics Approval Number 1200000297

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher:	Amanda McFadden – PhD student – Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
Associate Researchers:	Dr Rebecca Spooner-Land and Dr Donna Tangen – QUT

DESCRIPTION

This project is researching how teachers support students with Down syndrome in the early phase of learning in schools from prep-year 3. It also examines the sociocultural factors which support and challenge teachers' pedagogy and practice when working with students with Down syndrome. This study is being undertaken as part of a PhD project for Amanda McFadden.

The purpose of this project is to document teachers' experiences when working with students with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling. The project is not a critical examination of practice and pedagogy but a detailed exploration of teachers own experiences, perceptions and practice when working with students with Down syndrome. Despite attention on educational outcomes and policy to include students with disabilities including Down syndrome into schools effectively, little attention has been granted to that of the teachers' own experiences. This study is unique as its contribution lies in the telling of teachers own experiences and perceptions of working with students with Down syndrome.

You are invited to participate in this research project as you are working with a student with Down syndrome in your immediate class and are working in the prep-year 3 level of schooling.

The researcher requests your assistance as the sharing of your experiences will significantly inform future practice and policy.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from the project at any time without comment or penalty. Any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed. Your decision to participate, or not participate, will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT or with Education Queensland.

Your participation will involve 2 audio recorded interviews, 1 observation session in your class and observation of planning documents. The interviews will take place at mutually agreeable times on site at your school and will approximately take 20mins to 30 minutes. The type of questions asked will include for example: What factors challenge and support your pedagogy and practices when working with a student

with Down syndrome, and what assistance is available for you in your school to assist with the inclusion of a student with Down syndrome?

EXPECTED BENEFITS

It is expected that this project will not benefit you directly. However, it is possible the telling of your experiences may benefit current and future practitioners who work with students with Down syndrome.

RISKS

There is minimal risk associated with your participation in this project. These risks include a contribution of your time in the data collection phase and disruption to your classroom routine on the observation session. To minimise disruption to you, the data collection will occur at times agreed on with you.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially. Your details including name and school will be confidential and a code assigned to you to protect your privacy. Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of Research Data Policy.

Any information obtained in connection with this project that can identify you will remain confidential. It will only be disclosed with your permission, subject to legal requirements. It is planned to publically present and publish the results of this research however information will only be provided in a form that does not identify you. The audio recorded interviews will be destroyed after the completion of the project and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Once you understand what the project is about, and if you agree to participate, we ask that you sign the Consent Form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate. You are able to withdraw at any stage of the research.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

If have any questions or require any further information about the project please contact one of the research team members.

Amanda McFadden – Researcher	Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane Principal Supervisor	Dr Donna Tangen Associate Supervisor
Centre for Learning Innovation– QUT		
0414558761	School of Learning and Professional Studies – QUT	
a1.mcfadden@qut.edu.au	31388619 rs.spooner@qut.edu.au	31383807 d.tangen@qut.edu.au

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix I

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice

QUT Ethics Approval Number 1200000297

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Amanda McFadden – Researcher Centre for Learning Innovation– QUT 0414558761 a1.mcfadden@qut.edu.au	Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane Principal Supervisor School of Learning and Professional Studies – QUT 31388619 rs.spooner@qut.edu.au	Dr Donna Tangen Associate Supervisor 31383807 d.tangen@qut.edu.au

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the project will include audio recording of interviews.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Appendix J

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

Parent Information Letter for QUT Research Project
Centre for Learning Innovation
Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove
Q 4059

How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice

QUT Ethics Approval Number 1200000297

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher: Amanda McFadden, PhD student , Centre for Learning Innovation, QUT

June, 2012

Dear Parent,

I am writing to you to provide information regarding my research project entitled, How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice. This research project is part of my Doctoral research at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). My supervisors for this project are from the School of Learning and Professional Studies and are Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane and Dr Donna Tangen.

The purpose of this project is to document teachers' experiences when working with students with Down syndrome in the early phase of schooling (prep – year 3). The project is not a critical examination of practice and pedagogy but a detailed exploration of teachers own experiences, perceptions and practice when working with students with Down syndrome. I am hoping through this project teachers will be able to share their experiences with other educators to positively support students with Down syndrome in the early years of schooling. I have been an Education Consultant with the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland and it was through this work that this research project has eventuated.

Whilst the focus of this research is on education practice from the teacher's perspective, I will be undertaking one visit to your child's school to observe the teacher. This observation session will be carried out within the classroom and I will be present for the full school day. I am a registered teacher and have had the necessary criminal history checks to be a registered teacher in Queensland. The (one) observation session within the class is to highlight and support any evidence which comes out of the first interview with the teacher. Your child will not be the focus of the observation; however I will be recording information through field notes at that session. An example of the types of field notes may include information about interactions between the teacher and child, environmental observations such as seating position, the routine of the day and delivery of learning experiences.

The other data collection methods in this study include interviewing the teachers and observation of their planning documents. The type of questions I will be asking through the interview process include: What factors challenge and support your pedagogy and practices

when working with a student with Down syndrome and what assistance is available for you in your school to assist with the inclusion of a student with Down syndrome?

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially. Your details and your child's details including names will be confidential and a code assigned to you to protect your privacy. The details of your school and teacher will also be confidential. Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of Research Data Policy.

Any information obtained in connection with this project that can identify your child will remain confidential. It will only be disclosed with your permission, subject to legal requirements. It is planned to publically present and publish the results of this research, however information will only be provided in a form that does not identify your child, the school or the teachers participating. The audio recorded interviews will be destroyed after the completion of the project and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

I have enclosed a consent form should you feel comfortable with this research being conducted at your child's school.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal. Please contact me, or my supervisors, if you have any future questions or concerns. If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project, you can contact the Research Ethics Officer on 31383174 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. A consent form is attached for you to complete, indicating your agreement.

Yours faithfully,

Amanda McFadden – Researcher
Centre for Learning Innovation
Queensland University of Technology
Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove
Telephone: 041455876
Email: a1.mcfadden@qut.edu.au

Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane – Principal Supervisor
School of Learning and Professional Studies
Queensland University of Technology
Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove
Telephone: 31388619
Email: rs.spooner@qut.edu.au

Dr Donna Tangen – Associate Supervisor
School of Learning and Professional Studies
Queensland University of Technology
Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove
Telephone: 31383807
Email: d.tangen@qut.edu.au

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

PARENT CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

How Educators Support Students with Down Syndrome in the Early Years: Four Case Studies of Practice

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACTS

Amanda McFadden – PhD student	Dr Rebecca Spooner-Lane – Principal Supervisor
Centre for Learning Innovation - QUT	School of Learning and Professional Studies
Phone: 0414558761	Phone: 31388619
Email: a1.mcfadden@qut.edu	Email: rs.spooner@qut.edu.au

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information document regarding this project
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on [+61 7] 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- I understand that the teacher will discuss my child and I have no concerns about this

Parent's Details and Signature

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Appendix K

Teacher Interview Questions

- Remind about interview being audio recorded

1.	How long have you been a teacher?
2.	Is this your first experience working with a child with Down syndrome? If no, can you give some more information about your experiences working with students with Down syndrome?
3.	Are there any changes you make to your teaching approach when teaching a child with Down syndrome in your class?
4.	Can you describe the planning process you go through when planning for the child with Down syndrome in your class? Does this vary daily, weekly, monthly
5.	Can you describe the way you structure your learning environment (if needed for e.g. small group instruction, whole group instruction, placement of student etc)
6.	What supports do you feel have assisted you in the classroom when working with a child with Down syndrome?
7.	Are there any particular areas you find challenging when working with a child with Down syndrome in your class? Can you describe these challenges?
8.	What experiences have shaped your practice the most when working with a child with Down syndrome in your classroom?
9.	How does your school and wider network support you as a teacher working with a child with Down syndrome?
10.	What has particularly been helpful and practical to you as a teacher of a student with Down syndrome?
11.	If you were to have a discussion with a newly graduated teacher on your experiences of working with a student with Down syndrome in the early phases of schooling what experiences and information would you share with them?
	Thank you for your time